



UTAH PUBLIC LANDS ALLIANCE

*Together We Will Win,
But We Can't Do It Without You*

September 23, 2026

Jim Bacon, Director, Public Benefits, USDA Forest Service
201 14th Street SW
Public Benefits Office
Washington, DC 20250

Tom Schultz, Chief, USDA Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1111
tom.schultz@usda.gov

Submitted electronically via <https://www.regulations.gov/commenton/FS-2026-0100-0001>, and via email to addressees and CC recipients noted.

RE: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for Travel Management, National Forest System Lands; Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, 36 CFR Parts 212 and 261; Published Document: 2026-17211 (91 FR 54686)

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Adopt Proposed Revisions in Full

Dear Director Bacon & Chief Schultz,

Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA) is writing to provide public comment the Notice of Intent to prepare and environmental impact statement and forthcoming rulemaking for [Travel Management; National Forest System Lands](#), hereto forward referred to as “Rule.” The entirety of our membership live near and/or recreate throughout the 8.2 million acres of public land that is managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in Utah, as well as USFS-managed public lands throughout the rest of the USA. Our members are directly impacted by the framework of the existing Travel Management Rule, along with all components and phases of public engagement in National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and decision making as related to USFS public land management. Thus, our members are among the hundreds of millions of USDA Forest Service stakeholders who will be impacted by the outcome of revisions to this Rule. This letter of comment shall not supersede the rights of other UPLA agents, representatives, or members from submitting their own comments; the USFS should consider and appropriately respond to all comments received for the Rule.

UPLA is a non-profit organization representing over 5,800 members, in addition to speaking out for 69 OHV clubs and organizations. We advocate for responsible outdoor recreation, active stewardship of public lands, and encourage members to exercise a strong conservation ethic including “leave no trace” principles. We champion scrupulous use of public lands for the benefit of the general public and all stakeholders by educating and empowering our members to secure, protect, and expand shared outdoor recreation access by working collaboratively with public land managers, all recreationists, and other public land stakeholders. Our members participate in outdoor recreation of all forms to enjoy federally and state managed lands throughout Utah, including USFS managed public lands. UPLA members visit public lands to participate in motorized and human-powered activities such as off-roading, camping, hiking, canyoneering, horseback riding, sightseeing, photography, wildlife and nature study, observing cultural resources, and other similar pursuits on a frequent and regular basis throughout every season of the year. UPLA members and supporters have concrete, definite, and immediate plans to continue such activities in USFS-managed public lands throughout Utah and the USA for the indefinite foreseeable future.

I, Rose Winn, am an avid outdoor recreation enthusiast and anthropologist; hiking, backpacking, backcountry horseback riding, camping, rock climbing, off-roading, fishing, forage of wild herbs and plants for medicinal uses, and exploration of cultural and archeological sites and artifacts on public lands are among my core areas of activity and interest. I serve as the Natural Resources Consultant for Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA), a non-profit organization dedicated to keeping offroad trails open for all recreation users. While my profession allows me to advocate to protect public access to public lands for all stakeholders and multiple-uses, I also work as a volunteer on conservation, mitigation, and restoration projects on public lands.

As a joint writer of this comment letter, Loren Campbell is a Jeepster and UTV enthusiast from Virgin, Utah. Loren serves as the President of Utah Public Lands Alliance (UPLA). We share a strong interest in maximizing opportunities for offroad motorized recreation. Loren works full time as a volunteer advocate to protect access for all users, and also organizes and works as a volunteer on projects on public lands. UPLA, Loren, and I are also members of BlueRibbon Coalition. These comments are submitted on behalf of both myself and Loren Campbell, as well as our members and followers from within and outside of Utah.

Please note our support and agreement with the comments submitted by BlueRibbon Coalition.

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GENERAL COMMENTS

UPLA strongly supports adoption of the proposed revisions to 36 C.F.R. parts 212 and 261. After more than two decades of implementation, the existing Travel Management Rule has demonstrated that a closed-unless-designated framework does more than regulate motorized travel. It embeds a structural presumption against access, places disproportionate administrative burdens upon retaining and restoring routes, and permits temporary restrictions or incomplete inventories to become permanent through institutional inertia. The proposed rulemaking provides an overdue opportunity to replace that framework with a transparent, locally responsive, science-based system that begins with appropriate public use and requires restrictions to be supported by controlling law, reliable evidence, proportionality, and defined management objectives.

UPLA members regularly participate in Forest Service travel planning, land-management planning, NEPA review, route inventories, and collaborative stewardship throughout Utah's National Forests. Our members submit substantive comments, provide route-specific information, document historic and existing access, attend public meetings, coordinate with counties and state officials, and contribute volunteer labor and technical knowledge to road and trail projects. This sustained participation provides the Forest Service with information concerning route conditions, recreation demand, transportation-system connectivity, maintenance needs, public safety, emergency access, and the economic importance of motorized recreation to Utah's rural communities.

UPLA does not advocate unrestricted cross-country travel, indiscriminate creation of new routes, or exemption from environmental law. Existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and other established access features should remain available for appropriate public use unless restriction is required by controlling law, necessary to protect valid existing rights, or supported by specific and defensible findings demonstrating that less restrictive management cannot adequately address a documented condition. NEPA, the National Forest Management Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, the Wilderness Act, governing forest plans, and the Forest Service's emergency and public-safety authorities will remain fully operative. The proposed revisions change the decisional baseline and restore balance to travel planning. They do not eliminate environmental review or resource protection (Forest Service, 2026a).

This distinction is central to UPLA's support. Travel management should determine how public use can occur responsibly. It should not treat elimination of use as the presumptively successful outcome. Drainage repair, tread stabilization, hardened crossings, bridges, boardwalks, short relocations, seasonal controls, vehicle-class limitations, signing, education, enforcement, monitoring, and cooperative stewardship can frequently resolve site-specific concerns without eliminating the underlying access. Long-term closure should be selected only where reliable evidence demonstrates that these tools cannot reasonably address the identified condition. Every material restriction should be geographically and temporally proportionate, supported by an accessible administrative record, and accompanied by objective review and reopening criteria.

Utah's experience demonstrates why this reform is necessary. On Ashley National Forest, implementation of the existing rule determined not only which roads and trails would remain lawful, but whether families,

hunters, campers, and other visitors could obtain practical access to the surrounding landscape. The generally applicable 150-foot dispersed-camping corridor illustrates how a designation that appears adequate in the abstract may fail where topography, vegetation, snow, drainage, private boundaries, turnaround requirements, or established campsite locations demand a different local prescription (Forest Service, 2007a, 2007b). On Dixie National Forest, travel planning for the Cedar City, Powell, Escalante, and Fremont Ranger Districts generated conflicts with Utah transportation and access policies significant enough to prompt a statutory intergovernmental coordination framework (Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1). These examples demonstrate that travel management cannot be reduced to mileage totals or lines on a map. Its consequences extend to community access, dispersed recreation, county transportation interests, grazing administration, emergency response, and the practical availability of public lands.

The Paiute and Arapen trail systems further illustrate why individual route segments must be evaluated within their larger transportation networks. The Paiute system connects Fishlake National Forest with Richfield, Marysville, Fillmore, Salina, Kanosh, Monroe, Circleville, Junction, and surrounding communities. The Arapen system and Skyline Drive connect Manti-La Sal National Forest routes with Manti, Ephraim, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Huntington, Ferron, Orangeville, Joes Valley, and adjacent valleys. A short connector, mixed-use segment, staging route, or vehicle-class designation may determine whether hundreds of miles remain usable as an integrated system. Closure analysis must therefore address loop connectivity, access to destinations, geographic redundancy, displaced travel, emergency ingress and egress, and the economic effects upon gateway communities.

The revised rule should also replace the minimum-road-system paradigm with a requirement to maintain an adequate and appropriate transportation network. National Forest System roads and motorized trails are public infrastructure supporting recreation, wildfire suppression, prescribed fire, fuels treatment, timber and vegetation management, grazing administration, search and rescue, evacuation, utility service, law enforcement, watershed restoration, and post-fire recovery. During the Cowboy Fire, ground and resource-advisor personnel used older two-track routes to obtain closer access to affected Fishlake and Manti-La Sal lands (Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, 2020). Similar operational needs arise across Skyline Drive, the La Sal Mountains, the Abajo Mountains, the High Uintas, and other remote landscapes. Administrative scarcity is a management constraint. It should not become a land-allocation policy requiring elimination of otherwise valuable infrastructure.

Executive Order 14408 properly rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 and directed agencies to revise regulations adopted to implement their motorized-use-specific criteria. Retaining the former minimization framework, expressly or through functionally equivalent terminology, would perpetuate the same one-directional planning bias the Executive Order directed agencies to replace (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). The final rule should remove those criteria from subparts B and C and return motorized travel planning to the generally applicable statutory framework. Multiple-use administration requires the Forest Service to reconcile recreation, watershed, wildlife, range, timber, active management, and other congressionally recognized purposes. It does not authorize perpetual reduction of motorized access as an independent national objective (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960; Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, 2004).

Meaningful reform also requires a binding transition program. A new access presumption will provide little practical benefit if existing closures, omitted routes, outdated maps, and unresolved temporary restrictions are grandfathered indefinitely. The final rule should identify which provisions become operative on the effective date, require uniform national implementation direction within 180 days, direct every Utah national forest to publish a transition inventory, and establish a prioritized three-year review of legacy restrictions. It should open a public route-nomination process, apply the revised standards to pending and remanded proceedings, require expedited review of longstanding temporary orders, and provide annual public reporting of measurable implementation results.

The Forest Service should preserve meaningful forest-level discretion while establishing national requirements for evidence, transparency, governmental coordination, and accountability. Utah's national forests encompass the High Uintas, the Wasatch Front, central Utah's forested plateaus, the La Sal and Abajo Mountains, red-rock transition zones, deep-snow winter environments, municipal watersheds, grazing country, and heavily visited urban-interface canyons. Those landscapes cannot be competently managed through a uniform national formula. Forest Supervisors and District Rangers should be authorized to respond to actual soils, hydrology, snowfall, wildfire history, vehicle characteristics, recreation demand, maintenance capability, and partner resources.

Local discretion, however, must not become a rationale for diminished public participation. The final rule should preserve adequate notice, access to supporting information, opportunities to submit route-specific evidence, consultation with Tribes, coordination with state and county governments, and written explanations for significant restrictions. Counties, Tribes, grazing permittees, search-and-rescue organizations, recreation groups, adjacent communities, and individual users frequently possess historic maps, aerial imagery, maintenance records, photographs, GPS data, jurisdictional information, and direct knowledge that agency databases cannot reproduce. Streamlining should eliminate unnecessary duplication and delay. It should not insulate consequential decisions from informed review.

Travel decisions also carry measurable economic, social, and accessibility consequences. Utah's outdoor recreation economy generated approximately \$9.75 billion in economic output during 2024, supported 75,182 jobs, and produced approximately \$4.6 billion in wages (Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, 2026). Route restrictions influence visitor spending in communities serving the Paiute, Arapen, Skyline Drive, Ashley, Dixie, Abajo, and La Sal recreation systems. They also affect older adults, veterans, families with young children, hunters, anglers, and people with disabilities for whom motorized transportation supplies the only practicable means of reaching dispersed public lands.

UPLA therefore requests that the Forest Service evaluate and adopt the motorized-route-density approach proposed in the Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act, S. 2968. The bill's benchmark of 2.5 miles of authorized motorized road per square mile provides a measurable method for determining whether public lands remain functionally accessible to visitors unable to travel substantial distances on foot. Although the legislation has not been enacted, the Forest Service possesses authority to evaluate and incorporate its road-density benchmark, no-net-loss principle, disability-access findings, and equivalent-replacement concepts as travel-planning criteria (Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act, 2025). Every material closure should disclose its effect upon route density, access to destinations, adaptive vehicles, and visitors with mobility or functional limitations.

Finally, the programmatic EIS must examine these reforms as an integrated regulatory decision and evaluate meaningfully different alternatives. It should compare immediate and prospective implementation of the access presumption, alternative definitions of existing routes, graduated procedures for decisions of different scope, alternative closure and reopening standards, transportation-network standards under subpart A, and separate approaches to dispersed uses, winter travel, e-bikes, mobility devices, and backcountry airfields. The Forest Service must apply equivalent assumptions and analytical rigor to the environmental consequences of increased access and the social, economic, operational, and environmental consequences of continued closure. The programmatic character of the rulemaking does not permit the agency to disregard effects produced by the national presumptions, standards, procedures, exemptions, and implementation requirements it is selecting (*Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County*, 2025).

For these reasons, UPLA urges the Forest Service to adopt the proposed revisions in full and strengthen the final regulations through enforceable transition deadlines, mitigation-first closure standards, measurable access protections, current mapping, public route nomination, meaningful intergovernmental coordination, and recognition of Utah's substantial stewardship capacity. The appropriate objective is not unregulated use. It is reasoned, sustainable, and accountable access consistent with the Forest Service's congressional multiple-use responsibilities.

THE PROGRAMMATIC EIS MUST EXAMINE THE COMPLETE REGULATORY CHOICE AND MEANINGFULLY DIFFERENT ALTERNATIVES

Revision of 36 C.F.R. parts 212 and 261 will establish the national framework governing public travel and transportation management across 193 million acres of National Forest System lands. The effects of that decision will extend well beyond the wording of the regulations. The final rule will determine the presumptions, evidentiary standards, procedural thresholds, public-involvement requirements, exemptions, mapping systems, closure criteria, and administrative burdens that govern future decisions affecting roads, trails, airfields, trailheads, winter travel areas, dispersed-use corridors, and other public access points.

The environmental impact statement must evaluate the reasonably foreseeable consequences of those regulatory choices at the programmatic scale. It should not characterize the rule as a largely procedural action whose effects are too dependent upon later forest-level decisions to analyze. Although individual route changes will remain subject to applicable site-specific review, the national rule will determine whether local decisions begin from access or prohibition, whether existing closures receive meaningful reconsideration, what evidence may establish the existence of a route, how readily an erroneous designation can be corrected, and what showing is required before the public is excluded.

The Notice of Intent recognizes that the current Travel Management Rule has produced a complex and inflexible national framework and that applying the same requirements to every designation revision can impose analytical and procedural burdens disproportionate to the decision. It also leaves numerous consequential questions unresolved, including whether the open-unless-closed presumption will apply immediately or only prospectively, how "existing" routes will be defined, which procedural requirements

will remain, whether subpart A will be addressed independently, and how the rule will govern over-snow travel, e-bikes, dispersed uses, and other vehicle-specific activities (Forest Service, 2026a). These are substantive policy choices, not subsidiary implementation details.

NEPA and the Forest Service's current implementing procedures require comparative examination of the no-action alternative, the proposed action, and a reasonable range of technically and economically feasible action alternatives that satisfy the purpose and need. The alternatives should present materially different ways of implementing the proposed action and reveal meaningful differences in environmental, administrative, economic, and social consequences (National Environmental Policy Act, 42 U.S.C. § 4332; National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Procedures, 2026, 7 C.F.R. § 1b.7(h)(3)). A collection of nominal variations that retain the same practical result would not provide the agency or public with an informed choice.

UPLA requests that the EIS include, at minimum, the following alternatives and component variations.

1. Continuation of the Existing Travel-Management Framework

The no-action alternative should accurately evaluate continued operation of the closed-unless-designated system, the minimum-road-system requirement, the current procedures for changing motorized-use designations, and the minimization criteria derived from the rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989. The analysis should account for the full consequences of retaining those provisions, including planning delays, administrative expense, litigation exposure, declining route connectivity, outdated maps, maintenance deferral, concentration of use on fewer routes, and the difficulty of reopening routes after repair or changed conditions.

No action is not synonymous with no effect. Retaining the existing regulations would perpetuate a system under which lawful motorized use remains prohibited unless the agency has completed the affirmative work necessary to authorize it. Existing closures and restrictions would continue to influence access to Utah's trail systems, hunting areas, dispersed camps, winter recreation areas, grazing allotments, reservoirs, and adjoining public lands. The EIS should not assign environmental consequences exclusively to regulatory reform while treating continuation of the current system as an environmentally neutral baseline.

2. The Forest Service's Integrated Proposed Action

The proposed action should be evaluated as a complete regulatory framework rather than as a collection of unrelated amendments. Analysis should encompass removal of the former minimization criteria, establishment of an open-unless-closed presumption, replacement of the minimum-road-system standard, annual review of closed and highly restricted access features, modernization of public maps, differentiated procedures for corrections and designation revisions, and revised treatment of dispersed uses, over-snow vehicles, e-bikes, mobility devices, and backcountry airfields.

For each element, the EIS should identify whether the provision will have immediate regulatory effect, guide future agency decisions, depend upon subsequent directives, or require later unit-level

implementation. Without that distinction, the EIS cannot accurately evaluate when the anticipated benefits or adverse effects would occur.

3. Immediate Application of the Access Presumption

The EIS should examine an alternative under which the open-unless-closed presumption becomes effective upon promulgation, subject to applicable law, valid existing rights, controlling land-management-plan provisions, and specifically documented resource or public-safety needs. This alternative should establish an orderly transition process for reviewing current closures, severe restrictions, and nondesignated routes under the revised criteria.

Temporary continuation of existing restrictions may be necessary during the transition to avoid public confusion, but those restrictions should not be grandfathered indefinitely. Each National Forest System unit should be required to identify the legal and factual basis for existing closures, determine whether the original condition remains present, evaluate available mitigation, and establish a schedule for reconsideration. This alternative would best ensure that the new presumption produces a measurable change in public access rather than functioning solely as guidance for decisions that may not occur for many years.

4. Prospective-Only Application of the Access Presumption

The Forest Service should compare immediate implementation with an alternative under which existing MVUM and OSVUM decisions remain unchanged until a unit voluntarily undertakes a future designation revision. This alternative would impose the new presumption only upon later actions.

The EIS must disclose the practical consequences of that approach. Units constrained by staffing, funding, competing priorities, or institutional reluctance may never initiate comprehensive reconsideration. Existing route losses could therefore remain in place for decades notwithstanding the determination that the regulatory framework producing those outcomes should be replaced. In Utah, such delay would affect the integrated function of the Paiute, Arapen, Skyline Drive, Markagunt, Uinta, Abajo, and La Sal Mountain travel systems (among others), where the status of individual connectors can determine whether much larger networks remain usable.

5. A Structured Access-Recovery Alternative

UPLA requests evaluation of an alternative combining the proposed regulatory reforms with enforceable implementation measures. Each forest should be required to inventory closed and highly restricted routes, accept public route nominations, identify missing links and lost connectors, publish a prioritized review schedule, and evaluate opportunities to restore access through maintenance, relocation, seasonal management, cooperative stewardship, or vehicle-specific controls.

Priority should be assigned to routes that:

- restore loop connectivity or links between established trail systems;

- provide access to dispersed camps, hunting areas, reservoirs, trailheads, grazing allotments, and neighboring public lands;
- furnish ingress, egress, or operational access for wildfire response, fuels treatment, search and rescue, and post-fire recovery;
- correct mapping or vehicle-class errors;
- can be restored through state, county, nonprofit, or volunteer assistance; or
- provide the only practical means of access for older visitors, persons with disabilities, families with young children, and others with limited mobility.

The alternative should include a no-net-loss objective for functional motorized recreation opportunity. That measure should account for vehicle class, season, access to destinations, network connectivity, loop quality, and geographic distribution. A nominal mile of isolated or impassable road is not equivalent to a mile that connects communities, staging areas, camps, and regional trail systems.

6. Alternative Definitions of Existing Routes and Access Features

The EIS should compare an alternative recognizing only features already contained in the forest transportation atlas with a broader definition allowing existence to be demonstrated through historical maps, county transportation records, state datasets, aerial imagery, maintenance documentation, surveys, rights-of-way evidence, physical verification, and credible records of longstanding public use. Limiting consideration to the existing atlas would perpetuate earlier omissions caused by incomplete inventories, inconsistent data, administrative capacity, and prior planning assumptions. In Utah, county records and state transportation information are particularly important because many routes cross jurisdictional boundaries, connect federal lands with state and county systems, serve grazing or emergency-response functions, or implicate asserted rights-of-way. The EIS should estimate the types and number of routes likely to be excluded by an atlas-only definition and analyze the effects upon network continuity, jurisdictional coordination, and public access.

7. Graduated Procedures for Different Categories of Decisions

The EIS should compare alternative procedures for clerical corrections, minor designation adjustments, emergency restrictions, temporary closures, route relocations, repaired-route reopenings, and substantial network changes. These actions do not warrant identical administrative treatment.

Correcting a mapping error, reopening a repaired road, relocating a short segment away from a wet area, or modifying a vehicle-class designation should not require the same process as permanently closing a major trail system. Conversely, classification of a decision as “minor” should not permit the agency to eliminate a critical connector or materially alter access without meaningful public notice. Each alternative should define the decision categories, documentation requirements, responsible official, applicable public process, environmental-review pathway, and administrative-review mechanism.

8. Alternative Standards for Closure, Mitigation, and Reopening

The Forest Service should analyze an alternative requiring every material restriction to be supported by site-specific evidence, proportionate to the demonstrated problem, and preceded by consideration of reasonable management measures. Those measures should include maintenance, drainage correction, hardening, short relocation, seasonal controls, vehicle limitations, education, enforcement, partner assistance, and targeted restoration.

That alternative should be compared with a framework granting broader administrative discretion without an express mitigation sequence or defined reopening standards. The comparison should evaluate expiration dates for temporary closures, limits on repeated emergency orders, periodic review requirements, public access to supporting documentation, and objective criteria for reopening. The EIS should also consider whether the agency must affirmatively justify continued closure after the original condition has been corrected or no longer exists.

9. Alternative Transportation-System Standards Under Subpart A

Replacement of the minimum-road-system requirement warrants independent analysis. The Forest Service should compare the current standard with alternatives requiring an adequate and appropriate transportation network capable of supporting multiple use, recreation, grazing administration, forest and watershed management, wildfire suppression, prescribed fire, search and rescue, evacuation, utility service, law enforcement, and post-disturbance recovery.

The comparison must evaluate the costs of an insufficient network, not merely the expense of maintaining roads. An undersized transportation system can concentrate recreation, lengthen emergency response, prevent vegetation treatment, eliminate alternate evacuation routes, impede grazing operations, and increase dependence upon circuitous travel. Utah's varied geography makes those effects especially consequential. Access needs in the Uinta Mountains, central Utah plateaus, Wasatch Front canyons, and the La Sal and Abajo ranges cannot be captured through a national mileage-reduction objective.

10. Separate Alternatives for Dispersed Uses, Winter Travel, and Emerging Technology

The EIS should separately examine alternatives for dispersed camping, firewood collection, retrieval of legally harvested game, over-snow travel, Class 1 e-bikes, low-powered mobility devices, and aircraft access. These uses differ substantially in weight, speed, ground pressure, season, geographic distribution, duration, and interaction with natural resources.

For dispersed uses, the alternatives should compare fixed national distances with locally established corridors and geographic prescriptions. Utah terrain may require different approaches for the high Uintas, the Tavaputs Plateau, Fishlake's trail systems, Dixie's plateaus, and the La Sal Mountains.

For over-snow travel, the alternatives should evaluate snow-depth or frozen-ground thresholds, dynamic seasonal openings, mapped restricted areas, and real-time public information. Analysis should recognize that adequate snow cover changes the physical relationship between a vehicle and underlying soil and vegetation.

For Class 1 e-bikes and mobility devices, the EIS should compare retention of the existing motor-vehicle classification, exemption on trails open to conventional bicycles, and narrower or broader conditions based upon speed, power, weight, tread, and demonstrated effects. The analysis should separately consider opportunities for seniors, veterans, and persons with mobility limitations.

Programmatic analysis can address these matters without predicting every future route decision. The Forest Service possesses extensive MVUM and OSVUM data, transportation atlases, prior travel-management records, closure orders, maintenance information, litigation records, National Visitor Use Monitoring data, and recreation-use information. These materials can support representative scenarios showing how alternative regulatory frameworks are likely to operate.

The EIS should include representative geographic scenarios for areas with substantially different travel-management conditions. In Utah, appropriate examples include a large interconnected OHV system such as the Paiute Trail on Fishlake National Forest; a mixed road-and-trail network such as Arapen and Skyline Drive on Manti-La Sal National Forest; a dispersed-use and hunting-access landscape on Ashley National Forest; a deep-snow recreation area in the Wasatch or Uinta Mountains; and a high-use wildland-urban-interface setting on Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forest. Scenario analysis should evaluate the consequences of both reopening and continued restriction, including changes in route concentration, connectivity, maintenance demand, enforcement, community spending, emergency access, and resource conditions.

The Supreme Court has recognized that agencies possess substantial discretion to determine the appropriate scope and level of detail in an EIS and may draw a reasonable boundary around effects that are remote in time, location, or causal relationship. That discretion does not permit an agency to omit consequences directly produced by the regulatory choices under consideration (*Seven County Infrastructure Coalition v. Eagle County*, 2025). The Forest Service controls the national access presumption, closure standards, procedural categories, transition requirements, mapping obligations, and vehicle or use exemptions. The reasonably foreseeable consequences of those decisions fall squarely within the scope of this EIS.

The analysis must also employ consistent assumptions. If the Forest Service relies upon anticipated future local decisions to conclude that the rule will expand access, improve recreation opportunity, reduce administrative costs, or accelerate map corrections, it must use comparable assumptions when evaluating potential resource and management effects. The agency should not characterize beneficial outcomes as foreseeable while dismissing adverse outcomes as speculative, or do the reverse. Benefits, costs, and risks must be evaluated using equivalent geographic scales, time horizons, implementation assumptions, and standards of proof.

For every alternative, the EIS should disclose reasonably anticipated changes in:

- route miles and access opportunities by vehicle class and season;
- loop connectivity and access to destinations;
- planning duration and administrative expense;
- mapping accuracy and frequency of updates;
- public notice and participation;

- maintenance and enforcement requirements;
- state, county, nonprofit, and volunteer participation;
- wildfire, emergency-response, and active-management access;
- dispersed recreation, hunting, camping, and winter use;
- rural visitor spending and gateway-community effects; and
- access for disabled and mobility-limited visitors.

Where national estimates cannot be developed with precision, the Forest Service should provide reasonable ranges, representative case studies, sensitivity analysis, and a transparent explanation of uncertainty. Uncertainty is a reason to disclose assumptions and examine plausible outcomes, not a basis for disregarding a material issue.

UPLA supports the proposed reforms in full. A comprehensive and genuinely comparative alternatives analysis will demonstrate why removal of the former minimization criteria, adoption of an access-oriented presumption, restoration of forest-level decision-making, and replacement of the minimum-road-system paradigm are warranted. The final EIS and Record of Decision should select an alternative that produces measurable improvement in public access and ensures that implementation delays, procedural rigidity, or indefinite grandfathering of existing closures do not defeat the purpose of the rulemaking.

THE EXISTING RULE HAS PRODUCED A STRUCTURAL PRESUMPTION AGAINST MOTORIZED ACCESS

UPLA supports comprehensive revision of 36 C.F.R. parts 212 and 261, including adoption of a national policy under which existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and other established access routes and points remain available for appropriate public use unless restriction is required by law, necessary to protect valid existing rights, or supported by specific, documented, and administratively defensible findings. That reform is necessary because the existing Travel Management Rule does not operate from a neutral regulatory baseline. It establishes a structural presumption against motorized access by making prohibition the automatic legal consequence of non-designation.

Under the current framework, a responsible official must affirmatively designate each road, trail, or area for motor vehicle use by vehicle class and, where applicable, by season. Once the resulting Motor Vehicle Use Map is published, motorized use that is not expressly depicted and authorized becomes unlawful under 36 C.F.R. § 261.13. The 2005 rulemaking record expressly acknowledged that motor vehicle use would be prohibited outside the designated system and that user-created routes omitted from a designation decision would be closed “by operation of the final rule” (Forest Service, 2005). Thus, access may be eliminated without a route-specific closure order, without an individualized finding that continued travel is causing unacceptable effects, without a determination that less restrictive management measures would be ineffective, and without any prescribed procedure for subsequent reconsideration.

That architecture materially influences agency decision-making. Every existing route begins as a candidate for exclusion unless it successfully passes through designation, environmental review, system-road or system-trail classification, mapping, and publication. Conversely, once a route is omitted, the rule imposes no equivalent obligation to reconsider the omission when conditions improve, new information

becomes available, a maintenance partner emerges, or the original justification ceases to exist. The designation process therefore assigns nearly all procedural friction to keeping or restoring access, while allowing closure by omission to become self-perpetuating.

The resulting imbalance is particularly consequential in Utah, where National Forest System roads and trails do considerably more than provide recreational mileage. They connect rural communities with hunting areas, grazing allotments, reservoirs, dispersed campsites, trailheads, winter recreation areas, fire-management infrastructure, utility corridors, and adjoining federal, state, county, and private lands. Their value cannot be measured solely as isolated linear features. A comparatively short connector may determine whether an extensive trail system functions as a loop, whether visitors can reach a community without trailering between staging areas, whether emergency responders possess alternate ingress and egress, or whether older adults and people with mobility limitations can reach a destination at all.

Ashley National Forest illustrates how this regulatory presumption translates into practical consequences. The Forest implemented the TMR through separate travel-planning processes for the Vernal, Roosevelt and Duchesne, and Flaming Gorge Ranger Districts. At the time of those proceedings, the Vernal Ranger District administered 430 miles of National Forest System roads and 89 miles of system motorized trails. The Roosevelt and Duchesne districts administered 539 miles of system roads and 41 miles of motorized trails. Those proceedings determined not merely which routes would appear on an MVUM, but whether established travel patterns would remain lawful and whether dispersed motorized access would continue beyond the designated-route footprint. The selected approach generally limited motorized dispersed-camping access to specified corridors extending 150 feet from designated routes (Forest Service, 2007a, 2007b).

A 150-foot corridor may appear generous when considered abstractly. On the ground, however, its utility depends upon slope, vegetation, drainage, existing disturbance, private-property boundaries, snow accumulation, campsite location, and the physical ability to turn or park a vehicle and trailer safely. When those conditions place an established campsite outside the authorized corridor, the rule effectively eliminates access even though the principal road remains nominally open. The effect falls particularly heavily on families transporting camping equipment, hunters retrieving legally taken game, older recreationists, and individuals whose disabilities preclude carrying equipment substantial distances from a vehicle. The Ashley decisions therefore demonstrate that travel management affects the usable landscape surrounding a route, not merely the number of miles printed on a map.

Dixie National Forest provides a related example of the tension created when a national designation regime is applied without adequate deference to state transportation policy, county records, and longstanding travel patterns. Utah determined that federal travel planning for the Cedar City, Powell, Escalante, and Fremont Ranger Districts conflicted with state transportation and access policies and established an intergovernmental coordination process to address those inconsistencies (Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1). That controversy cannot be dismissed as a disagreement over isolated recreational preferences. Routes on the Markagunt, Paunsaugunt, Aquarius, and adjacent plateaus serve community access, livestock administration, hunting, camping, fire response, wood gathering, and connections between federal lands and county transportation systems.

The Forest Service must not treat an MVUM as conclusive evidence that no road existed before publication or that no legally cognizable transportation interest survives outside the mapped system. An MVUM communicates the agency's current motor-vehicle designation. It does not, by itself, adjudicate the existence of an asserted right-of-way, extinguish a valid existing right, supersede county transportation records, or erase physical and historical evidence of a route. The revised rule should expressly preserve that distinction and require consideration of county road records, historic maps, maintenance documentation, aerial imagery, state transportation plans, recorded instruments, and credible evidence of longstanding use before an existing route is treated as nonexistent or permanently unavailable.

The Paiute Trail on Fishlake National Forest and the Arapeen Trail System and Skyline Drive on Manti-La Sal National Forest further demonstrate why route-by-route designation cannot substitute for network-level analysis. The Paiute system depends upon interconnected forest roads and trails serving Richfield, Marysvale, Fillmore, Salina, Kanosh, Monroe, Circleville, Junction, and surrounding communities. The Arapeen system relies upon routes connecting Manti, Ephraim, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Ferron, Orangeville, Huntington, Joes Valley, and adjacent valleys. Within these systems, a short connector, staging route, mixed-use road, or vehicle-class authorization may determine whether hundreds of miles remain usable as an integrated network.

A planning method that evaluates each segment principally as an exception to a general prohibition systematically undervalues connectivity, redundancy, destination access, and the cumulative social and economic function of the larger system. It may also produce counterproductive environmental results. Eliminating connectors can concentrate use on fewer surviving routes, increase repeated out-and-back travel, require highway trailering between access points, and remove alternate routes needed during wildfire, flooding, maintenance work, or temporary closures. A rational travel-management analysis must therefore examine the consequences of exclusion as carefully as the effects of continued use.

The existing rule also creates an asymmetry in the treatment of evidence. Continued motorized access is commonly required to withstand detailed scrutiny concerning soils, wildlife, hydrology, user conflict, maintenance capacity, and enforcement. Yet exclusion may follow simply because a route was not proposed, lacked complete agency inventory data, was characterized as unauthorized, or could not be processed within the personnel and financial constraints of a particular planning cycle. Administrative scarcity then becomes a permanent land-use determination. That is neither sound transportation planning nor a faithful implementation of the multiple-use mandate.

The Administrative Procedure Act requires reasoned decision-making and authorizes courts to set aside agency action that is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise contrary to law, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). An agency must examine the relevant information, consider important aspects of the problem, and articulate a rational connection between the evidence and the decision reached (*Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the United States, Inc. v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co.*, 1983). For travel management, relevant considerations include not only the potential effects of motorized use, but also network connectivity, access to destinations, displacement of use, wildfire and emergency-response capability, effects upon rural communities, disability access, maintenance partnerships, and the

availability of less restrictive measures. A decisional structure that permits closure by omission without comparable consideration of those consequences is legally and analytically deficient.

UPLA does not contend that every visible track must be incorporated into the National Forest Transportation System or that every route is appropriate for every vehicle class, season, or intensity of use. The Forest Service retains ample authority under the Organic Administration Act, the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act, the National Forest Management Act, forest plans, environmental statutes, and general closure regulations to address documented threats to resources or public safety. The relevant question is whether a particular impact can be responsibly managed, not whether closure is administratively simpler.

In many circumstances, drainage repair, tread hardening, a short relocation, seasonal limitations, vehicle-width restrictions, barriers preventing departure from the route, speed controls, education, enforcement, cooperative maintenance, or targeted restoration can address the identified concern while preserving access. The existing rule does not require those measures to be evaluated before non-designation produces a prohibition. It likewise supplies no generally applicable standard requiring that a restriction be geographically confined, temporally limited, periodically reviewed, or tied to measurable reopening criteria.

The revised regulations should correct this structural defect. The final rule should:

1. establish a rebuttable presumption that existing roads, trails, and access points remain available for appropriate public use unless restriction is required by controlling law or supported by route-specific findings;
2. require the responsible official to identify the particular resource, safety, administrative, or legal condition supporting a material restriction and explain the causal relationship between that condition and the regulated use;
3. require consideration of maintenance, relocation, seasonal controls, vehicle-class limitations, cooperative stewardship, enforcement, and other less restrictive measures before long-term closure or non-designation;
4. require analysis of system-level connectivity, destination access, geographic redundancy, emergency use, displacement, community effects, and access for people with disabilities;
5. prevent the omission of a route from an MVUM from being treated as an adjudication of route existence, ownership, jurisdiction, or valid existing rights;
6. provide a proportionate procedure for reconsidering omitted routes, correcting mapping errors, designating short connectors, reopening repaired routes, and modifying vehicle-class or seasonal restrictions;
7. require every long-term closure or substantial restriction to include objective performance measures, review dates, and ascertainable conditions for reopening; and
8. ensure that lack of agency staffing or appropriated maintenance funding does not become a permanent closure rationale where state, county, nonprofit, permittee, or volunteer capacity can perform the necessary work under lawful cooperative authority.

These reforms would not guarantee designation of any particular route. They would restore a neutral and legally defensible decisional framework in which continued access and restriction are evaluated on their

respective evidence. That is the appropriate regulatory foundation for administering national forests under a multiple-use mandate. Public access should not depend upon successfully overcoming an embedded presumption of prohibition, and closure should not persist merely because an earlier planning process failed to place an established route on a map.

PUBLIC ACCESS SHOULD BE THE REGULATORY STARTING POINT

UPLA strongly supports adoption of “open unless closed” as the governing presumption for existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and other established access routes and points on National Forest System lands. Properly defined, this standard would replace the existing rule’s prohibition-oriented default with a management framework that begins from responsible public use while preserving the Forest Service’s full authority to impose restrictions required by law or supported by documented, site-specific conditions.

The proposed reform is legally supportable, administratively sound, and more consistent with congressional direction than a system under which motorized access exists only after the agency affirmatively designates each route, vehicle class, and season of use. Congress directed that national forests be administered for outdoor recreation together with range, timber, watershed, wildlife, and fish purposes under the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 (MUSYA), 16 U.S.C. §§ 528–531. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), 16 U.S.C. §§ 1600–1614, requires integrated planning, resource protection, and consistency with governing land-management plans, but it does not establish a national presumption disfavoring motorized recreation. The Organic Administration Act authorizes the Forest Service to regulate occupancy and use and to protect national forests from destruction and depredation, but it does not convert exclusion into the principal purpose of national forest administration, 16 U.S.C. § 551.

Congress has more recently reaffirmed public recreation as an affirmative federal land-management objective. The EXPLORE Act establishes a federal policy of fostering recreation on federal recreational lands and waters, directs agencies to improve recreation data and mapping, and recognizes both motorized and nonmotorized access as legitimate components of the federal outdoor-recreation system (Expanding Public Lands Outdoor Recreation Experiences Act, 2025). A presumption favoring appropriate use of existing transportation features, subject to evidence-based restrictions, more faithfully implements these enactments than a framework under which access disappears unless an administrative unit completes every procedural step required to grant affirmative permission.

The Presumption Would Correct a Fundamental Regulatory Imbalance

The existing Travel Management Rule places access and restriction on materially different procedural footing. Under the current framework, motor vehicle use becomes unlawful outside routes and areas affirmatively designated and displayed on an MVUM. The 2005 rulemaking record acknowledged that routes omitted from the designated system would become unavailable to motor vehicle use by operation of the final rule, even without an individualized closure determination for each route (Forest Service, 2005).

Consequently, an existing road or trail may become unlawful to use because it was omitted from an inventory, excluded from the scope of a planning process, categorized as unauthorized without further evaluation, or never processed within the personnel and financial limitations of the responsible unit. None of those circumstances independently demonstrates that continued travel would violate a governing law, conflict with a valid existing right, or cause unacceptable environmental effects. Nevertheless, once a route is omitted from the enforceable map, reopening commonly requires new administrative initiative, environmental review, funding, mapping, and defense against potential litigation.

Open unless closed would correct this asymmetry by requiring the Forest Service to make an affirmative and reviewable determination before materially restricting an existing access feature. The revised standard should not operate merely as a general policy preference. It should function as a substantive rule of decision requiring the responsible official to identify the legal or factual basis for a restriction, consider practical management alternatives, disclose the consequences of lost access, and establish ascertainable conditions for review and reopening.

This approach is consistent with the Administrative Procedure Act, which requires reasoned agency decision-making and authorizes courts to set aside agency action that is arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of discretion, or otherwise contrary to law, 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). An agency must examine the relevant information, consider important aspects of the problem, and articulate a rational connection between the evidence before it and the decision reached (*Motor Vehicle Manufacturers Association of the United States, Inc. v. State Farm Mutual Automobile Insurance Co.*, 1983). For travel management, relevant considerations include not only the potential effects of motorized use, but also network connectivity, displaced travel, access to destinations, wildfire and emergency-response capability, grazing and permit administration, economic consequences, disability access, partner capacity, and the effects of concentrating use on fewer remaining routes.

Open Unless Closed Would Not Authorize Unmanaged Cross-Country Travel

The Forest Service should define the presumption precisely. Open unless closed should apply to existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and associated access features. It should not authorize indiscriminate cross-country travel, the creation of new routes through previously undisturbed terrain, entry into congressionally designated Wilderness, infringement upon private property or valid existing rights, or use prohibited by another controlling statute or legal instrument.

Existing MVUM and Over-Snow Vehicle Use Map designations should remain effective during an orderly transition to the revised framework. The Forest Service should retain authority to impose:

- emergency closures addressing wildfire, flooding, landslides, extreme weather, hazardous trees, infrastructure failure, or an immediate public-safety threat;
- seasonal restrictions supported by documented wildlife, watershed, soil, snow, or safety conditions;
- vehicle-class, width, weight, speed, or equipment limitations;
- temporary restrictions necessary to complete maintenance, restoration, prescribed fire, timber operations, or other active-management work;

- closures required by statute, valid existing rights, court order, or an applicable forest-plan component; and
- site-specific restrictions supported by reliable evidence demonstrating that continued use would produce an unacceptable condition that cannot reasonably be addressed through less restrictive measures.

NEPA, NFMA, the Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act, National Historic Preservation Act, Wilderness Act, governing forest plans, valid existing rights, and the Forest Service's general closure authorities would remain fully operative. Open unless closed changes the decisional baseline and the required burden of explanation. It does not suspend substantive environmental law or prevent responsible officials from addressing genuine threats to resources or public safety (Forest Service, 2026a).

This clarification should appear in the regulatory text and preamble. Leaving the operative meaning of open unless closed to subsequent directives or unit-level interpretation would invite inconsistent implementation and unnecessary litigation. The final rule should expressly distinguish an established route from new cross-country disturbance and distinguish a rebuttable presumption favoring continued use from an entitlement to use every route under every condition.

Long-Term Restrictions Must Be Supported by Site-Specific Findings

Before closing an existing route or materially restricting its use for longer than a defined emergency period, the responsible official should be required to issue a written administrative finding identifying:

1. the specific route, segment, area, vehicle class, or season affected;
2. the statutory, regulatory, plan-based, safety, or resource condition supporting the restriction;
3. reliable evidence connecting the identified condition to the particular route or use being restricted;
4. the baseline condition against which potential effects were evaluated;
5. the reasonably foreseeable consequences of closure, including displacement, loss of connectivity, concentration of use, emergency-response implications, disability-access effects, and economic consequences;
6. the maintenance, relocation, hardening, seasonal, vehicle-specific, educational, enforcement, or restoration measures considered;
7. the reason less restrictive measures would not adequately address the identified condition;
8. the narrowest geographic and temporal restriction capable of accomplishing the stated purpose;
9. objective monitoring and performance standards; and
10. a review date and defined procedure for reopening, modifying, or terminating the restriction.

The required process should remain proportionate to the decision. A temporary closure responding to an active wildfire does not require the same analysis as permanent elimination of a trail-system connector. If an emergency restriction remains in place beyond a specified period, however, the responsible official should be required to issue a written continuation finding and provide public notice. Emergency authority should remain immediately available, but it should not become an alternative mechanism for imposing an indefinite closure without further analysis.

The final rule should also assign the agency the burden of producing substantial evidence supporting a long-term restriction. Members of the public should not be required to prove that an existing route is environmentally harmless before continuing a lawful use. Where the Forest Service concludes that restriction is necessary, the administrative record should demonstrate the condition requiring intervention and why the chosen response is proportionate to that condition.

Active Management Must Precede Long-Term Closure

Travel management should determine how access can occur responsibly. Closure should be the final tool considered after reasonable management measures have been evaluated. Before imposing a long-term restriction, the Forest Service should consider a mitigation sequence that includes, where applicable:

- drainage installation and repair;
- tread stabilization and erosion control;
- hardened stream, spring, and wet-area approaches;
- bridge, culvert, or boardwalk construction;
- short route relocation;
- seasonal or wet-weather limitations;
- vehicle-width, weight, or class restrictions;
- speed controls and signing;
- barriers directing travel away from sensitive areas;
- sanitation facilities;
- education and targeted enforcement;
- cooperative maintenance and monitoring; and
- restoration confined to the route segment or adjoining area producing the identified effect.

The inquiry should not be whether these measures can eliminate every conceivable effect. Multiple-use management does not demand an absence of all impacts from every authorized activity. The proper question is whether mitigation can reduce the identified effect to an acceptable level under governing law, applicable forest-plan standards, and site-specific conditions. Requiring complete elimination of risk would transform resource protection into a de facto prohibition standard.

Utah's managed trail systems demonstrate that access and conservation are not mutually exclusive. On Fishlake National Forest, the Paiute Trail Committee and experienced volunteers have worked with the Forest Service on trail maintenance and infrastructure, including improvements that protect wet areas and channel use onto sustainable alignments. A boardwalk, hardened crossing, drainage structure, or short realignment addresses the physical source of an impact while retaining public access. Such work represents travel management functioning as management.

The same principle applies on Manti-La Sal National Forest. The Arapeen Trail System uses an interconnected combination of numbered trails and forest roads to distribute travel and connect staging areas and communities with destinations such as Joes Valley and Skyline Drive. Routes on Elk Ridge, including Chimney Park, Horse Flat, Gooseberry, and South Cottonwood, can be administered as connected loops through appropriate signing, maintenance, seasonal prescriptions, and vehicle-specific

controls. Treating these routes as unrelated lines would ignore how the public actually uses the transportation system and how agencies can distribute use to avoid concentrating impacts.

Ashley National Forest provides another important application. The Forest's prior travel-management proceedings generally limited motorized dispersed-camping access to corridors extending 150 feet from designated routes (Forest Service, 2007a, 2007b). A uniform distance may be appropriate in some locations, but its practical value depends upon topography, vegetation, drainage, snow, private boundaries, vehicle-turnaround space, and the location of existing camps. Open unless closed should allow responsible officials to authorize mapped corridors, specific access spurs, or locally appropriate distances where those measures preserve dispersed recreation without permitting unrestricted cross-country travel.

The Presumption Must Protect Network Function

The final rule should require responsible officials to evaluate routes as components of transportation networks rather than as isolated segments. A short connector may determine whether a trail system remains usable as a loop, whether visitors can reach a campground or reservoir, whether a community remains linked to a recreation destination, or whether emergency personnel possess alternate ingress and egress when wildfire, flooding, snow damage, or infrastructure failure blocks the primary route.

This concern is especially significant for Utah's premier motorized systems. The Paiute Trail and its connectors serve Richfield, Marysville, Fillmore, Salina, Kanosh, Monroe, Circleville, Junction, and surrounding communities. The Arapahoe system and Skyline Drive connect Manti, Ephraim, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Huntington, Ferron, Orangeville, Joes Valley, and adjoining valleys. A short mixed-use road, connector trail, or vehicle-class authorization can determine whether hundreds of miles function as a coherent regional system.

A closure that appears minor when measured only in mileage may impose substantial consequences when evaluated at the network level. It can convert a loop into an out-and-back trip, require highway trailering between staging areas, isolate an established camp, concentrate travel on fewer routes, or remove alternate access needed during an emergency. The closure record should therefore quantify:

- loss of loop opportunities and intersystem connections;
- changes in access to trailheads, campsites, reservoirs, hunting areas, grazing allotments, and scenic destinations;
- increases in out-and-back travel or highway trailering;
- displacement onto adjoining routes, jurisdictions, or communities;
- loss of fire-management, evacuation, search-and-rescue, and maintenance redundancy;
- effects on visitors unable to substitute prolonged pedestrian travel for motorized access; and
- consequences for rural businesses, volunteer programs, and state or county recreation investments.

These considerations should be mandatory elements of the decision, not discretionary subjects omitted when an administrative unit lacks time, personnel, or funding.

State, County, and Historic Route Evidence Must Receive Meaningful Consideration

Implementation of open unless closed must recognize that an MVUM communicates the Forest Service's current motor-vehicle designation, but does not independently adjudicate route ownership, determine county jurisdiction, extinguish a valid existing right, or establish that an omitted route never existed. The final rule should preserve the legal and functional distinction between the forest transportation atlas and the enforceable public-use map.

This distinction is particularly important in Utah, where county transportation systems, historic access patterns, grazing administration, state access policies, and federal routes frequently intersect. Utah law expressly provides an intergovernmental coordination structure concerning travel management on the Cedar City, Powell, Escalante, and Fremont Ranger Districts of Dixie National Forest (Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1). The revised federal rule should require meaningful consideration of county transportation plans, historic maps, maintenance records, aerial imagery, recorded instruments, state planning documents, prior agency inventories, and credible evidence of longstanding use.

The final rule should prohibit the Forest Service from relying solely upon omission from an MVUM as proof that a route does not exist or lacks legal significance. Where route ownership, jurisdiction, or a valid existing right remains disputed, the agency should preserve the dispute and avoid using a travel-management designation as a substitute for the legally required adjudicatory process.

Open Unless Closed Requires a Functional Transition Process

The proposed reform cannot be implemented effectively if existing MVUMs are simply declared controlling for an indefinite period. Such an approach would preserve the cumulative consequences of the closure-oriented system while changing only the prospective wording of the regulation. Existing maps may remain enforceable during transition, but the final rule should establish a defined process for reconsidering routes excluded under the former standard.

The Forest Service should create a public route-nomination procedure through which counties, Tribes, the State of Utah, grazing permittees, recreation organizations, emergency responders, search-and-rescue organizations, adjacent landowners, and individual users may submit route information. Relevant evidence should include historic maps, aerial imagery, GPS data, maintenance records, photographs, prior inventories, state and county transportation records, evidence of longstanding public use, connectivity information, and documented stewardship commitments.

The rule should authorize proportionate review for clerical map corrections, short connectors, repaired routes, seasonal adjustments, dispersed-camping access, and vehicle-class modifications that do not present potentially significant environmental effects. It should also provide procedures for accepting partner-funded or partner-performed maintenance before administrative scarcity is used to support continued closure.

Requested Regulatory Direction

UPLA requests that the final rule:

1. establish open unless closed as a rebuttable national presumption for existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and other established access routes and points;
2. expressly distinguish use of an existing route from unrestricted cross-country travel or creation of a new route;
3. retain emergency, seasonal, vehicle-class, public-safety, and resource-protection authority while requiring written findings for restrictions extending beyond a defined emergency period;
4. require reliable route-specific evidence, proportionality, consideration of closure consequences, and analysis of less restrictive management measures;
5. establish a mitigation-first sequence in which maintenance, drainage correction, hardening, relocation, seasonal controls, vehicle limitations, education, enforcement, and cooperative stewardship precede long-term closure;
6. require analysis of network connectivity, geographic redundancy, displacement, emergency access, grazing and permit administration, disability access, and community effects;
7. require objective monitoring standards, expiration or review dates, and measurable reopening criteria for every long-term closure;
8. require meaningful consideration of county transportation plans, state access policies, historic maps, aerial imagery, maintenance records, prior inventories, and credible evidence of longstanding use;
9. clarify that omission from an MVUM does not adjudicate route existence, ownership, jurisdiction, or valid existing rights;
10. establish a public route-nomination process and proportionate procedures for map corrections, repaired-route reopenings, short connectors, dispersed-access designations, and vehicle-class or seasonal modifications; and
11. prohibit agency staffing limitations or inadequate appropriations from becoming permanent closure rationales where Utah, a county, a nonprofit organization, a recreation club, or another lawful partner can provide the necessary capacity.

Open unless closed does not subordinate resource protection to recreation. It requires the Forest Service to reconcile both responsibilities through evidence, proportionality, mitigation, monitoring, and transparent decision-making. That framework honors the multiple-use mandate, directs limited resources toward actual conditions on the ground, and restores the proper legal premise that national forests are public lands intended for responsible public use.

THE RESCINDED EXECUTIVE ORDERS SHOULD NOT SURVIVE THROUGH REGULATORY INERTIA

Executive Order 14408 rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 and directed the responsible agencies to rescind or revise regulations adopted to implement them. It concluded that modern environmental statutes and agency-specific land-management authorities provide an adequate framework for responsible OHV management and directed development of a system furnishing greater access, recreation opportunity, and multiple-use benefits (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). The existing TMR incorporated the designation criteria derived from those rescinded orders. Maintaining those criteria as a motorized-use-specific regulatory overlay would preserve the substance of a policy that the current Executive Order directs the Forest Service to replace.

UPLA therefore supports removal of the minimization criteria from subparts B and C. In application, minimization has too often been interpreted as a one-directional obligation to reduce the geographic presence of motorized travel. Every mile excluded can be characterized as additional minimization, while lost connectivity, displacement onto fewer routes, impaired maintenance access, reduced hunting and camping opportunity, and injury to gateway communities receive no equivalent mandatory weight. Removing the criteria will not create a regulatory void. NEPA requires informed evaluation of reasonably foreseeable effects and reasonable alternatives, but does not require selection of the environmentally preferable alternative (*Robertson v. Methow Valley Citizens Council*, 1989). NFMA and forest plans continue to supply substantive direction. The ESA, Clean Water Act, NHPA, Wilderness Act, and other applicable statutes remain enforceable. Multiple-use administration requires the agency to reconcile competing uses, not maximize one resource value across every acre (*Norton v. Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance*, 2004).

The replacement framework should incorporate a mitigation sequence that begins with maintenance, drainage repair, hardening, short relocation, seasonal management, vehicle limitations, education, enforcement, and targeted restoration. Long-term closure should be selected only where reliable evidence demonstrates that those tools cannot reasonably resolve the identified problem. Such an approach directs limited funding toward the source of an impact rather than assuming that a line removed from a map constitutes successful resource management.

DECISIONS MUST RETURN TO THE FORESTS AND COMMUNITIES THAT KNOW THE LANDSCAPE

Utah's national forests encompass the high Uinta Mountains, the Wasatch Front, the Tavaputs Plateau, central Utah's forested plateaus, the La Sal and Abajo ranges, red-rock transition zones, deep-snow winter landscapes, municipal watersheds, grazing country, and heavily visited urban-interface canyons. A uniform national formula cannot competently prescribe identical travel outcomes for Flaming Gorge, American Fork Canyon, the Paiute system, Skyline Drive, the La Sal Mountains, and the Markagunt Plateau.

Forest Supervisors and District Rangers should be empowered to consider actual soils, hydrology, snowfall, wildfire history, vehicle classes, recreation demand, community access, maintenance capability, and partner resources. Local discretion should be accompanied by clear accountability: accessible records, current maps, proportionate notice, a means for submitting route evidence, and written findings supporting significant restrictions. Counties, Tribes, the State of Utah, grazing permittees, emergency responders, search-and-rescue organizations, OHV groups, hunters, anglers, snowmobile clubs, and rural residents possess information that national datasets cannot reproduce.

Utah law provides a particularly relevant coordination model. Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1 directs coordination concerning the Cedar City, Powell, Escalante, and Fremont districts of Dixie National Forest and calls for intergovernmental bodies capable of addressing inconsistencies in transportation planning. The final federal rule should affirm that county transportation plans, state access policies, historic maps, maintenance records, aerial imagery, recorded rights-of-way, and credible evidence of longstanding use

must be considered without allowing the MVUM itself to predetermine the existence or legal status of a route.

Travel decisions should not be processed as land-management-plan amendments unless an amendment is actually necessary to resolve inconsistency with an applicable plan component. Clerical map corrections, short relocations, repaired-route reopenings, connector designations, and vehicle-class adjustments warrant procedures proportionate to their effects. The final rule should authorize efficient review and appropriate categorical exclusions where NEPA permits, while preserving comprehensive analysis for decisions with a potential for significant environmental consequences.

CLOSURE DECISIONS MUST INCLUDE A PATH BACK TO USE

UPLA strongly supports annual unit-level review of closed and highly restricted access routes and points. Closure rationales do not remain static. A damaged culvert can be replaced, a wet crossing can be hardened, a trail can be relocated away from a sensitive feature, vegetation can recover, a wildfire can fundamentally change prior habitat conditions, or a county and recreation organization can secure funding that was unavailable when the restriction was imposed.

Recent Utah fire closures illustrate the need to distinguish temporary operational restrictions from permanent travel designations. During the 2026 Babylon Fire, public lands on the Monticello Ranger District of Manti-La Sal National Forest were closed in stages to protect the public and maintain safe fire operations. As conditions changed, Forest Road 50082, Forest Road 50084, and other areas were reopened through coordinated decisions involving the Forest Service, San Juan County, state agencies, and other federal partners. Similar route-specific restrictions have accompanied fires affecting the Ferron District and the La Sal Mountains. These actions demonstrate legitimate closure authority operating as intended because restrictions were connected to defined hazards and were withdrawn when conditions allowed.

The annual review process should publish the responsible official, legal authority, original basis, date, current condition, outstanding work, estimated cost, available partner capacity, and reopening criteria for every long-term closure or severe restriction. The public should be permitted to nominate routes and provide photographs, engineering information, maintenance commitments, historic records, and proposed mitigation. Priority should be given to routes that restore loops, connect recreation areas, serve established camps, provide alternate ingress and egress, support fuels work or emergency response, and improve access for visitors with mobility limitations.

The phrase “subject to available appropriations” should not become a means to avoid even an inventory-level review. A lack of immediate construction funds may affect the timing of physical work, but it should not prevent the Forest Service from identifying the required work, accepting partner proposals, or establishing the conditions under which access can resume.

REFORM MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY AN ENFORCEABLE TRANSITION PROGRAM

The revised Travel Management Rule will succeed only if its substantive reforms are accompanied by a definite and transparent implementation program. Adoption of an open-unless-closed policy, removal of the former minimization criteria, and annual review of restricted routes will provide little practical benefit if existing designations remain indefinitely insulated from the new standards or if individual National Forest System units receive no schedule for implementation.

The Notice of Intent states that existing motor vehicle and over-snow vehicle designations will remain effective until revised under the amended regulations. It also provides that the proposed access presumption will guide future decisions but will not independently change the legal status of a road, trail, airfield, trailhead, or other access point (Forest Service, 2026a). Preserving existing maps temporarily is administratively reasonable. The public requires a clear statement of lawful use during the transition, and the Forest Service cannot reconsider every route and republish every MVUM and OSVUM on the effective date of the final rule.

Temporary continuity, however, cannot become permanent regulatory inertia. Without binding implementation requirements, forests may continue relying upon decisions produced by the former closed-unless-designated system for years or decades. Units facing limited staff, competing priorities, incomplete data, unresolved jurisdictional questions, or institutional resistance may never initiate comprehensive revision. The new rule could then announce a national preference for public access while leaving the physical transportation network, and the restrictions governing it, materially unchanged.

That outcome would be particularly consequential in Utah. The Paiute, Arapsee, Skyline Drive, Markagunt, Uinta, Abajo, and La Sal Mountain systems (among others) operate as interconnected networks rather than collections of isolated route segments. A single missing connector, staging route, seasonal designation, or vehicle-class limitation can determine whether a loop remains functional, whether a community retains access to a regional trail system, and whether visitors can reach camps, reservoirs, hunting areas, grazing allotments, and adjoining public lands. Delaying implementation would preserve the very network fragmentation the rulemaking is intended to correct.

Indefinite preservation of decisions based upon the prior framework would also conflict with Executive Order 14,408. The Order did not merely express a generalized preference for access. It rescinded Executive Orders 11,644 and 11,989 and directed the responsible agencies to revise or rescind the regulations adopted to implement them in favor of a framework supplying greater access, recreation opportunities, and multiple-use benefits (Exec. Order No. 14,408, 2026). The final rule must therefore distinguish between maintaining existing designations briefly for administrative continuity and exempting them permanently from reconsideration under the replacement standards.

UPLA requests that the final regulations and Record of Decision establish the following transition requirements.

1. Specify Which Provisions Become Operative Upon the Rule's Effective Date

The final rule should identify which provisions take immediate effect, which require revised Forest Service directives, and which depend upon later unit-level action. Removal of the former minimization criteria should apply immediately to new, pending, supplemental, and remanded travel-management proceedings to the extent permitted by applicable law and any controlling judicial order. The new procedures for accepting route evidence, correcting clerical errors, reviewing closures, and considering cooperative maintenance capacity should likewise become available upon the rule's effective date.

Any categorical exemptions for particular vehicles or uses should identify the governing limitations directly in the regulation. If the final rule authorizes defined uses associated with dispersed camping, firewood collection, retrieval of legally harvested game, Class 1 e-bikes, mobility devices, or other activities, it should state whether those provisions are self-executing or require a subsequent local designation. The Forest Service should not announce an exemption while leaving its operation contingent upon manuals, handbooks, or local direction with no completion deadline.

2. Issue Uniform National Implementation Direction Within 180 Days

The Chief should issue national transition direction within 180 days after publication of the final rule. That direction should establish common data requirements, decision categories, documentation standards, public-notice procedures, reporting measures, and map-update protocols. Uniform national procedures are necessary to prevent implementation from varying according to the resources or policy preferences of individual units.

National consistency should govern the process, not predetermine local outcomes. Forest Supervisors and District Rangers must retain authority to respond to actual soil, hydrology, snow, wildfire, recreation, grazing, maintenance, and public-safety conditions. The implementation direction should provide a reliable procedural framework through which those local judgments are made and disclosed.

The direction should distinguish among:

- correction of a clerical or cartographic error;
- a minor designation adjustment;
- reopening after repair or mitigation;
- a seasonal or vehicle-class modification;
- a temporary emergency restriction;
- relocation of a short route segment;
- recognition of an existing route omitted from the designated system; and
- a substantial decision affecting numerous route miles, regional connectivity, or an established recreation system.

The current practice of subjecting materially different actions to comparable procedural burdens has impeded timely management. A corrected map label or reopening of a repaired culvert should not require the same process as closure of an entire trail network. Conversely, a decision should not be classified as minor merely because the affected segment is short if that segment provides the only connection between two major systems.

3. Require Every Utah National Forest to Publish a Transition Inventory

Within one year of the final rule's effective date, each National Forest System unit should publish an initial inventory of closed and highly restricted roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, winter travel areas, and other access points. At minimum, the inventory should identify:

- the route or access feature and its location;
- the date and authority for the restriction;
- whether the restriction resulted from nondesignation, a travel decision, a temporary order, an emergency closure, a seasonal limitation, or a vehicle-class restriction;
- the original factual basis;
- whether the cited condition remains present;
- whether wildfire, restoration, repair, acquisition of legal access, changed wildlife conditions, or new information has altered the analysis;
- maintenance or mitigation necessary to restore use;
- applicable county, state, Tribal, or private access interests;
- known partner interest or available external funding;
- discrepancies among the transportation atlas, MVUM or OSVUM, closure orders, and field signs; and
- the proposed priority and timetable for review.

The existing MVUM cannot serve as a substitute for this inventory. The map generally identifies where motorized travel is lawful, but it does not disclose why a route was omitted, whether mitigation was considered, whether the decision depended upon the former minimization criteria, or whether the condition supporting exclusion persists.

The inventory should also recognize that roads and trails frequently extend across multiple jurisdictions. A Forest Service designation may affect connections to state lands, county roads, Bureau of Land Management routes, private inholdings, and asserted rights-of-way. The transition process must examine those relationships before treating a federal map omission as dispositive.

4. Complete Review of Priority Restrictions Within Three Years

Following publication of the inventory, each unit should complete review of its highest-priority restrictions within three years. Priority should be assigned to routes or decisions that:

- interrupted established loops or regional trail systems;
- eliminated access to trailheads, reservoirs, established camps, hunting areas, grazing allotments, or adjoining public lands;
- were based substantially upon the former minimization criteria;
- exclude a vehicle class without current, route-specific justification;
- remain subject to an emergency or temporary order after the initiating condition has passed;
- can be corrected through maintenance, drainage work, hardening, short relocation, seasonal management, or partner-supported restoration;
- provide wildfire, fuels-treatment, evacuation, search-and-rescue, utility, or administrative access;
- involve conflicting maps, signs, orders, or jurisdictional records; or

- have been nominated by a county, Tribe, the State of Utah, an affected permittee, a recreation organization, or a member of the public.

Review does not require automatic reopening. It requires the responsible official to apply the revised standards, consider present conditions and reasonable mitigation, coordinate with affected governments and stakeholders, and publish a defensible decision. Where closure remains necessary, the decision should identify the evidence, the required geographic and temporal scope, the insufficiency of less restrictive measures, and the conditions that could support future reopening.

5. Subject Longstanding Emergency and Temporary Orders to Expedited Review

Emergency closures remain indispensable during wildfire, flash flooding, avalanche conditions, bridge failure, active suppression operations, and other immediate hazards. Utah's recent fire closures demonstrate that such authority can operate responsibly when restrictions correspond to identifiable hazards and are reduced or rescinded as conditions change.

The transition process should identify every emergency or temporary restriction that remains active beyond its original operational period. Within 180 days after the final rule becomes effective, the responsible official should allow each such order to expire, replace it with a current and time-limited order, or initiate the process required for a longer-term designation decision.

Renewal should disclose the continuing condition, work completed, remaining treatment, estimated cost, available funding, partner proposals, and measurable reopening criteria. Repeated issuance of substantially identical temporary orders should not become a means of avoiding the evidentiary and public-participation requirements applicable to long-term closure.

6. Apply the New Standards to Pending and Remanded Proceedings

Travel-management actions lacking a final decision on the effective date should proceed under the revised regulations. Supplemental reviews, administrative reconsiderations, and judicial remands should apply the new standards to the extent consistent with controlling court orders and other applicable law.

Rescission of the former executive-order framework does not independently vacate a final judgment or override an injunction. It does, however, change the governing national policy and the regulations under which the Forest Service will exercise its continuing discretion. The agency should not perpetuate superseded minimization requirements in an open administrative proceeding merely because analysis began before the new rule became effective.

Where a completed travel decision is being litigated, the Forest Service should determine whether voluntary remand, supplemental analysis, or another transition mechanism is appropriate. That determination should account for the stage of litigation, present resource conditions, reliance interests, the public cost of continued litigation, and the inconsistency of defending a regulatory standard the agency has rescinded or materially revised.

7. Open a Public Route-Nomination Process on the Effective Date

The public should be able to nominate a route for correction, redesignation, reopening, relocation, or modification as soon as the final rule becomes effective. Submissions should permit historical maps, county records, aerial imagery, photographs, declarations of use, maintenance histories, engineering information, connectivity analysis, proposed mitigation, accessibility information, and commitments of labor, equipment, or funding.

Each nomination should receive a public tracking number and an initial agency classification. The Forest Service should explain whether the request will be addressed as a clerical correction, minor revision, annual-review candidate, jurisdictional inquiry, or substantive travel-management action. It should also identify the responsible unit and anticipated review period.

Utah counties and recreation organizations have substantial route knowledge that cannot be reconstructed from national datasets. A meaningful nomination process will allow that information to become part of the administrative record before a unit determines that a route lacks value or that reopening is infeasible.

8. Integrate State, County, Tribal, and Local Coordination Into the Transition

Transition inventories and priority schedules should be circulated to affected counties, Tribes, state agencies, grazing permittees, emergency responders, utilities, search-and-rescue organizations, and recreation groups before finalization. Consultation after the Forest Service has already determined which routes deserve review would provide little practical benefit.

Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1 reflects the importance of intergovernmental coordination where federal travel planning conflicts with state transportation policy, particularly on the Cedar City, Powell, Escalante, and Fremont Ranger Districts of Dixie National Forest. The transition process should use that coordination structure rather than repeating the institutional conflict that accompanied earlier planning (Utah Code § 63J-8-105.1, 2026).

County transportation plans, state access policies, recorded easements, historic maps, road-maintenance evidence, public-use records, emergency-response plans, and asserted rights-of-way must be considered. An MVUM depicts federal motor-vehicle designations. It does not create or extinguish title, determine the validity of an asserted right-of-way, or resolve the jurisdictional status of a road. The final rule should preserve that limitation expressly (Forest Service, 2026a).

9. Coordinate Transition With Utah Funding and Stewardship Capacity

Implementation planning must account for resources available outside the Forest Service. Utah's OHV Recreation Grant program, county contributions, nonprofit organizations, clubs, snowmobile groups, search-and-rescue teams, and volunteer trail crews supply funding, equipment, labor, maintenance, signing, bridge work, education, and specialized technical capacity. In 2025 alone, the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation awarded approximately \$1.78 million to 30 projects serving trail maintenance, search

and rescue, snowmobile grooming, education, access protection, tourism, and related needs (Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, 2025).

Before maintenance or administrative capacity is used to continue a restriction, the responsible official should identify:

- the work necessary for reopening;
- the estimated cost;
- the equipment, expertise, and permits required;
- available federal, state, county, or grant funding;
- lawful cooperative-agreement mechanisms;
- interested partners; and
- the conditions under which partner-supported work may proceed.

The phrase “subject to available appropriations” should not excuse failure to inventory a route, accept public information, identify corrective work, establish priority, or consider partner assistance.

Appropriations may control when agency-funded construction occurs. They do not prevent transparent planning or lawful cooperation.

10. Provide an Implementation Grace Period and Reliable Public Notice

Changes in route status, seasonal designations, dispersed-use corridors, vehicle classifications, and map format should be publicized before punitive enforcement begins. The Forest Service should issue change summaries, updated digital and printable maps, downloadable offline data, georeferenced PDFs, and field signs before enforcing a newly adopted restriction, except where immediate enforcement is necessary to address a documented emergency.

Where a sign, MVUM, OSVUM, closure order, and digital layer provide conflicting information, the Forest Service should correct the discrepancy promptly. Visitors should receive education or a warning before citation unless the evidence demonstrates intentional misconduct, refusal to comply with a lawful order, or actual resource damage.

A transition grace period is particularly necessary where routes cross administrative boundaries or where cellular service is unavailable. Recreationists traveling between the Paiute system, county roads, state lands, and adjoining federal routes should not be expected to reconcile conflicting digital and paper sources while in the field.

11. Measure Implementation Through Public Annual Reporting

The Forest Service should publish a national annual report organized by region and administrative unit. The report should identify:

- transition inventories completed;
- routes and restrictions reviewed;
- miles reopened, added, relocated, seasonally managed, or retained as closed;
- changes by vehicle class and season;

- loops and destination connections restored;
- temporary orders expired, renewed, or converted;
- map discrepancies corrected;
- nominations received, pending, and resolved;
- county, state, Tribal, nonprofit, and volunteer participation;
- partner funds and labor used;
- MVUM and OSVUM updates completed; and
- unmet deadlines and corrective measures.

Raw mileage cannot be the sole performance measure. A short connector between two major systems may provide greater public value than many miles of isolated spur road. Reporting should therefore address functional connectivity, access to destinations, geographic distribution, season of use, vehicle class, emergency utility, and the number of communities served.

The report should also explain why a unit failed to meet an implementation deadline and establish a corrective schedule. Without public performance measures, the effectiveness of the new rule will depend upon anecdote, and units that decline to implement its access provisions will be indistinguishable from those confronting legitimate technical obstacles.

These transition requirements would preserve short-term administrative continuity without allowing the former regulatory system to survive indefinitely through inaction. They would provide local officials with an orderly means of reconsidering accumulated restrictions while protecting public safety, resources, valid existing rights, and the integrity of ongoing judicial proceedings.

UPLA supports comprehensive revision of the Travel Management Rule because the existing system has made restriction easier to impose than access is to restore. The transition process must not reproduce that imbalance. Existing designations may remain temporarily operative while they are inventoried and reviewed, but they should not receive permanent immunity from the access presumption, proportionality standards, mitigation requirements, cooperative-management provisions, and reopening procedures adopted in the final rule.

PUBLIC MAPS MUST BE CURRENT, ACCURATE, AND USABLE IN THE FIELD

Travel restrictions cannot be administered fairly when an MVUM, roadside sign, digital application, temporary order, and actual condition provide different answers. UPLA supports integrated, GIS-compatible mapping as the authoritative public source, consistent with the EXPLORE Act. The mapping system should identify allowed vehicle classes, seasons, dispersed-use corridors, temporary orders, closure authority, effective dates, and the next scheduled review.

The forest transportation atlas and enforceable public-use map perform different functions. The atlas may incorporate new information about the existence and condition of roads, trails, and airfields, while the MVUM or successor map communicates lawful public designations. The revised rule should preserve that distinction and prevent a clerical map correction from being used to impose a substantive restriction without the procedure otherwise required for that decision.

Digital modernization cannot mean cellular dependence. Large portions of Ashley, Fishlake, Dixie, and Manti-La Sal National Forests lack reliable service. The Forest Service should provide downloadable offline layers, georeferenced PDFs, printable maps, accessible formats, consistent symbols, archival editions, and machine-readable closure data. When signs and authoritative maps conflict, the agency should correct the discrepancy promptly and use education or warnings before punitive enforcement unless there is evidence of knowing or damaging conduct.

DISPERSED RECREATION WINTER TRAVEL AND EMERGING VEHICLES REQUIRE SEPARATE TREATMENT

The final rule should restore practical mechanisms for motorized access associated with dispersed camping, firewood collection, retrieval of legally taken game, and similar traditional uses. Utah's Ashley planning decisions illustrate why this matters. A uniform 150-foot dispersed-camping corridor may be workable on some terrain but inadequate where topography, vegetation, private boundaries, snow, or established camps require a different local prescription. The final rule should permit responsible officials to authorize mapped corridors, defined distances, seasons, geographic areas, and vehicle classes rather than perpetuating a nationwide prohibition.

Over-snow travel warrants an independent standard. Adequate snow cover materially changes a vehicle's interaction with soil and vegetation. The Uinta, Wasatch, Boulder, Tushar, and La Sal ranges present different snow depths, seasons, terrain, avalanche conditions, and winter-use patterns. Local managers should retain authority to restrict travel where documented wildlife, watershed, safety, or conflict conditions require action, but OSV use should be presumed appropriate where adequate snow or frozen ground protects underlying resources. Objective opening thresholds, real-time information, and adaptive seasonal management are more scientifically defensible than static assumptions carried over from summer travel.

UPLA also supports exempting Class 1 e-bikes from the motor-vehicle designation requirement on trails where conventional bicycles are allowed, subject to forest-plan direction and lawful site-specific restrictions. Low-powered electric mobility technology should be evaluated by speed, power, weight, tread, and observable effects rather than by an obsolete binary label. Carefully defined mobility-device provisions can also expand public-land participation by seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities without diminishing existing rights under disability-access law.

UTAH NEEDS A FUNCTIONAL TRANSPORTATION NETWORK, NOT AN ABSTRACT MINIMUM

Subpart A should replace the minimum-road-system paradigm with criteria for an adequate and appropriate forest transportation network. National Forest System roads and motorized trails are infrastructure used for recreation, wildfire suppression, prescribed fire, vegetation treatment, search and rescue, evacuation, grazing administration, utility access, timber and fuels work, law enforcement, invasive-species control, watershed repair, and post-fire recovery.

Utah experience provides direct evidence. During the Cowboy Fire affecting Fishlake and Manti-La Sal lands, ground and resource-advisor crews used old two-track roads to obtain closer access to the fire area (Utah Watershed Restoration Initiative, 2020). In the La Sal Mountains, the Pack Creek Fire required structure protection and operations near Pack Creek and La Sal Mountain Loop Road. The Babylon Fire required repeated decisions about Forest Roads 50082, 50084, 50092, 50095, and connected routes as suppression conditions and flash-flood hazards changed. On the Ferron District, fire closures have referenced Skyline Drive, Reeder Canyon Trail, Potters Canyon Road, and Millers Flat Road as boundaries and operational features. These examples do not establish that every road is tactically valuable. They establish that road location, condition, redundancy, and connectivity must be examined before closure or decommissioning.

Current 36 C.F.R. § 212.5(b)(1) already requires the Forest Service to consider safe and efficient travel and the administration, utilization, and protection of National Forest System lands. The word “minimum” has too often overshadowed those functional obligations. The revised standard should ask what network is needed to fulfill multiple-use duties, support public access, and provide management and emergency capability. A numerical objective to eliminate the greatest mileage is not a substitute for that analysis.

FISCAL CONSTRAINTS SHOULD ACTIVATE UTAH PARTNERSHIPS RATHER THAN ELIMINATE ACCESS

UPLA recognizes that the Forest Service faces maintenance backlogs, staff vacancies, and competing demands. Those constraints do not demonstrate that permanent closure is the proper land-use outcome. Agency staffing is only one element of available capacity. Utah combines registration revenue, motor-fuel-tax revenue, state grants, county participation, nonprofit work, and volunteer labor to sustain motorized recreation.

In 2025, the Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation awarded approximately \$1.78 million to 30 projects through a summer OHV Recreation Grant cycle, supporting trail maintenance, search and rescue, education, snowmobile grooming, access protection, tourism, and land acquisition (Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, 2025). The program is available to counties, municipalities, federal agencies, and qualifying OHV organizations. Past projects have supported the Uinta-Wasatch-Cache motorized program, Color Country maintenance on the Markagunt and related systems, trail crews, signage, bridges, and equipment.

Fishlake National Forest documents the value of this model. Paiute Trail Committee members have installed a boardwalk at Anderson Dairy, and volunteers have supplied specialized equipment and operator expertise on forest motorized trails. Across Utah, counties, clubs, snowmobile organizations, search-and-rescue teams, and nonprofit partners provide work that would otherwise require scarce federal appropriations. Recreationists are not merely consumers of access. They are an experienced stewardship workforce.

The final rule should require consideration of partner capacity before maintenance or administrative limitations are relied upon to support a long-term closure. It should facilitate cooperative work under 36 C.F.R. § 212.3, volunteer agreements under the Volunteers in the National Forests Act, 16 U.S.C. §§

558a–558d, challenge cost-share agreements, OHV Recreation Grants, Recreational Trails Program funding, county agreements, and other lawful partnerships. A closure record should identify the work needed, estimated cost, eligible funding mechanisms, and conditions under which a partner may complete the work.

ACCESS DECISIONS CARRY MEASURABLE CONSEQUENCES FOR UTAH COMMUNITIES AND FAMILIES

Motorized recreation generates spending on lodging, fuel, food, equipment, repairs, permits, guides, rentals, and local services. These expenditures are particularly important to rural communities with seasonal economies and limited industrial diversity. Utah's outdoor recreation economy generated approximately \$9.75 billion in economic output in 2024, supported 75,182 jobs, and produced approximately \$4.6 billion in wages (Utah Division of Outdoor Recreation, 2026). These totals are not attributable solely to OHV use on national forests, but they establish the scale of the economy supported by continued access to Utah's recreation landscapes.

The effects of route decisions occur locally. Richfield, Marysville, Fillmore, Salina, Kanosh, Monroe, Circleville, Beaver, and Junction serve the Paiute and Fishlake systems. Manti, Ephraim, Mount Pleasant, Fairview, Huntington, Ferron, Orangeville, and Price benefit from Arapen, Skyline Drive, Joes Valley, and adjoining recreation. Vernal, Duchesne, Manila, and Roosevelt serve Ashley National Forest destinations, while Cedar City, Panguitch, Escalante, and Torrey support access to Dixie National Forest. Monticello, Blanding, Moab, and La Sal connect visitors to the Abajo and La Sal ranges. Loss of a connector can turn a loop into an out-and-back trip, isolate a trailhead or campground, shorten a visit, or make an area impractical for a family towing an OHV.

The social consequences are equally real. Roads and motorized trails extend national forest experiences to older adults, people with disabilities, veterans, families with young children, hunters, anglers, campers, photographers, rockhounds, and visitors who cannot reach remote destinations by prolonged foot travel. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794, prohibits disability discrimination in federally conducted programs, while the Architectural Barriers Act and Forest Service accessibility policies inform outdoor facilities and programs. These authorities do not compel motorized access everywhere, but they require serious consideration of whether restriction removes the only practicable means of public participation.

The EIS should quantify route mileage and functional connectivity by vehicle class and season; access to camps, trailheads, reservoirs, hunting areas, and adjoining lands; local visitor spending; volunteer investment; agency replacement costs; and distributional effects on rural communities. A programmatic analysis limited to biophysical effects would omit critical elements of the human environment. The Forest Service should use National Visitor Use Monitoring data, Utah economic information, county tourism data, state grant records, and reasonable scenarios to assess both the consequences of access and the consequences of closure.

MOTORIZED ROUTE DENSITY IS AN ESSENTIAL MEASURE OF DISABILITY ACCESS

Travel management decisions do not affect all members of the public equally. Closing a motorized route may inconvenience an able-bodied visitor who can reach the same destination by hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, or another nonmotorized method. For many people with mobility, respiratory, cardiac, neurological, visual, or other disabilities, however, the same decision may eliminate access altogether. A person who can walk only a short distance, cannot traverse steep or uneven terrain, uses supplemental oxygen, experiences chronic pain or fatigue, or depends upon adaptive equipment may be physically capable of enjoying a campsite, overlook, lake, cultural site, hunting area, or picnic location once transported there, but incapable of traveling miles from the nearest open road.

In this context, a motor vehicle is not merely a recreational preference. It may function as the person's principal mobility device and the only practicable means of participating in outdoor recreation. Jeeps, side-by-sides, ATVs, over-snow vehicles, and highway-legal vehicles extend the geographic reach of people who cannot hike prolonged distances or negotiate difficult terrain. Motorized access also allows family members, caregivers, adaptive-recreation organizations, and veterans' groups to transport mobility equipment, medical supplies, camping gear, and other necessary support.

The loss of a road or motorized trail consequently produces a distributional effect that is not captured by a simple acreage or mileage calculation. A closure may leave the land technically open to the public while making it functionally unavailable to a significant portion of the public. The legal status of the acreage does not compensate for the loss of a usable means of reaching it.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits exclusion of an otherwise qualified individual with a disability from a federal program or activity solely by reason of disability (Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. § 794). Forest Service accessibility guidance similarly recognizes that accessibility must be integrated into the planning, design, construction, and maintenance of outdoor recreation facilities and trails while respecting their natural settings (Zeller et al., 2012). These authorities do not require every National Forest System road or trail to be open to motor vehicles, nor do they eliminate legitimate restrictions necessary for public safety, resource protection, valid existing rights, or compliance with other federal law. They do require the agency to recognize that equal access cannot be evaluated solely through the physical design of developed facilities.

An accessible restroom, picnic table, fishing platform, or campsite provides little practical benefit if the road necessary to reach it has been closed. Similarly, an accessible trailhead does not supply meaningful access to a person who cannot reach the trailhead by vehicle. The Forest Service Outdoor Recreation Accessibility Guidelines and related design standards address important features of constructed facilities, but facility-level accessibility does not resolve landscape-level exclusion caused by an inadequate motorized transportation network. Travel management must account for the complete access chain from the public road system to the recreation destination.

Utah's geography makes this concern particularly acute. Many destinations on Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-La Sal, and Uinta-Wasatch-Cache National Forests are separated from developed communities by extensive mountain terrain. Recreation opportunities surrounding the High Uintas, Flaming Gorge,

Boulder Mountain, the Tushar Mountains, Skyline Drive, Joes Valley, the Markagunt Plateau, the La Sal Mountains, and the Abajo Mountains cannot ordinarily be reached through a short, level walk from a paved parking area. Closing a connector or terminating motorized use miles from a destination may remove that opportunity entirely for a person with limited mobility.

Winter restrictions can have comparable effects. Over-snow vehicles may provide the only practical access available to a disabled visitor when roads are covered by deep snow and conventional vehicles cannot travel safely. Likewise, dispersed-camping corridors and short motorized approaches allow visitors with disabilities to camp with family members, hunt, fish, photograph wildlife, or participate in organized recreation without requiring every destination to be converted into a developed facility.

The environmental impact statement should therefore evaluate disability access as an independent effect of the proposed rule and its alternatives. The Forest Service should measure more than the aggregate mileage of routes remaining open. It should evaluate:

- the distribution of open motorized routes across the landscape;
- the distance between open roads and recreation destinations;
- access to campgrounds, dispersed camps, trailheads, reservoirs, fishing areas, hunting areas, overlooks, cultural sites, and winter recreation areas;
- route availability by vehicle class and season;
- whether a closure eliminates the only practicable motorized approach;
- opportunities for adaptive vehicles and low-powered mobility devices;
- the availability of connected loops that permit participation without repeated loading and unloading;
- accessible parking, gates, barriers, signs, and transfer areas; and
- the extent to which alternate routes provide genuinely comparable access.

The analysis should also distinguish between nominal and functional access. A route that appears open on an MVUM but is disconnected, physically impassable, seasonally unavailable, inaccessible to the necessary vehicle class, or terminated far from the relevant destination does not provide an equivalent opportunity.

The Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act Provides a Quantifiable Access Standard

UPLA recommends that the Forest Service incorporate the principal road-density protections proposed in the Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act into the revised Travel Management Rule. Introduced by Utah Senators Mike Lee and John Curtis as S. 2968, the legislation offers a measurable framework for determining when public land retains sufficient motorized connectivity to support access for people with disabilities. The bill defines “disability-accessible land” as each square mile of public land assessed as containing at least 2.5 miles of authorized road accessible to motorized vehicles or off-road vehicles. It would require the Forest Service and Department of the Interior to account for the total length of traversable, approved roads within each square mile when developing motor-vehicle-use maps and travel-management plans (Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act, 2025, §§ 2–4).

This provision should be understood accurately. It does not categorically require construction of 2.5 miles of new road within every square mile of federal land. Instead, the bill establishes a quantitative standard for identifying land that presently possesses a meaningful density of authorized motorized access. It then protects qualifying areas against closures that would reduce authorized road density below 2.5 miles per square mile, subject to specified emergency and direct-safety exceptions. For lands falling below that level, the bill directs managers to consider reopening roads closed during the preceding 10 years and generally prevents further reduction absent a direct health or safety threat (Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act, 2025, § 4).

The 2.5-mile standard supplies an objective measure that is presently missing from the Travel Management Rule. Existing travel analysis typically evaluates whether a particular road should remain open, but does not require the agency to determine whether successive route-by-route closures leave enough transportation infrastructure for disabled visitors to reach and use the surrounding landscape. Each isolated closure may appear limited when examined individually, while the combined result is an extensive area accessible only to people capable of strenuous nonmotorized travel.

The Forest Service should incorporate the bill's road-density approach into the revised rule through the following provisions:

1. **Inventory road density.** Each administrative unit should calculate and publicly map the mileage of traversable, authorized motorized roads and trails within each square mile of National Forest System land, or through an equivalent transparent geospatial methodology that preserves the 2.5-mile-per-square-mile benchmark.
2. **Protect qualifying areas against net loss.** Where a square mile presently contains at least 2.5 miles of authorized motorized routes, the Forest Service should not approve a closure that would reduce the area below that threshold unless the route presents a documented direct threat to health or safety, closure is required by controlling law, or an equivalent replacement route is designated.
3. **Prevent further deterioration in deficient areas.** Where road density is already below 2.5 miles per square mile, the Forest Service should presume against additional closure and review whether previously closed routes can be restored through maintenance, relocation, seasonal controls, vehicle limitations, or partner-supported mitigation.
4. **Require replacement of lost access.** When closure of a route is unavoidable, the agency should designate a reasonably equivalent alternate route within a defined period. The replacement should preserve access to the same general destination, network connection, recreation setting, season, and appropriate vehicle classes. A distant road that does not serve the affected destination should not qualify as equivalent mitigation.
5. **Prioritize routes serving diverse recreation opportunities.** The bill directs attention to roads providing access for hunting, fishing, camping, hiking, birdwatching, boating, mountain biking, cultural and natural sites, motorized recreation, e-bikes, and over-snow vehicles. The revised rule should likewise recognize that motorized routes frequently provide the initial access upon which many motorized and nonmotorized activities depend (Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act, 2025, § 4(a)(3)).
6. **Coordinate with affected governments.** Identification of priority access roads should occur in coordination with the State of Utah, counties, local governments, and Tribal governments. Search-and-rescue organizations, veterans' groups, disability advocates, adaptive-recreation

providers, OHV organizations, and residents with direct experience using the affected routes should also participate.

7. **Consider emergency and management functions.** Roads beneficial for fuels treatment, wildfire response, evacuation, and search and rescue frequently provide the same geographic connectivity needed by visitors with disabilities. The road-density analysis should account for these overlapping public benefits rather than evaluating recreation and emergency access in isolation.
8. **Publish the analysis before closure.** Every proposed long-term closure should disclose the current road density, the density after closure, the destinations and communities affected, the availability of equivalent routes, and the effects on people who depend upon motorized access.

The Forest Service may need to adapt portions of S. 2968 to remain within its existing statutory and regulatory authority. The bill's legislative provisions, including its proposed categorical exclusion and specific treatment of unadjudicated rights-of-way claims, should not be represented as existing law before enactment. The road-density concept itself, however, is well suited for incorporation into the Travel Management Rule as a planning standard, closure criterion, mapping requirement, and indicator of functional access.

At minimum, the EIS should evaluate an alternative incorporating the 2.5-mile density standard, a no-net-loss requirement for qualifying areas, and replacement-route mitigation when closure is unavoidable. It should compare that alternative with a framework that evaluates closures without any quantitative accessibility floor. The analysis should disclose how many acres of National Forest System land in Utah presently meet the proposed benchmark, how many fall below it, and how the proposed alternatives would change that distribution.

Disability Access Must Be Incorporated into Every Closure Decision

The final rule should require a written disability-access finding before a long-term route closure or material vehicle-class restriction is approved. That finding should answer:

- Does the route provide the only practical motorized access to a destination?
- What is the existing and post-decision route density?
- Which disabilities or mobility limitations are likely to be affected?
- Is there an alternate route offering comparable access?
- Can maintenance, relocation, seasonal controls, or vehicle limitations resolve the concern?
- Have disabled users and adaptive-recreation organizations been consulted?
- Will the decision isolate an accessible facility or trailhead?
- If closure is necessary, when will replacement access become available?

Disability analysis should not be confined to visitors who use wheelchairs or possess disability parking placards. Many impairments substantially limit walking, climbing, balance, breathing, stamina, vision, cognition, or tolerance for heat, cold, elevation, and uneven surfaces without requiring continuous use of a visible mobility device. Travel planning should recognize the range of conditions that make motorized transportation necessary.

Nor should the agency assume that designation of one accessible developed site compensates for closing access to dispersed public lands. Equal participation includes the ability to camp with family, hunt, fish, view scenery, visit cultural sites, photograph wildlife, travel with an OHV club, and experience remote landscapes. Concentrating disabled visitors into a small number of developed facilities does not provide an equivalent substitute for reasonable access to the broader National Forest System.

UPLA therefore requests that the final Travel Management Rule adopt the Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act's 2.5-mile-per-square-mile benchmark as a minimum access-protection standard, establish a presumption against net loss in areas meeting that benchmark, and prioritize restoration where existing density falls below it. This approach would convert disability access from a generalized consideration into a measurable component of travel planning and would help ensure that public lands remain meaningfully public to people whose participation depends upon motorized transportation.

THE PRINCIPAL OBJECTIONS DO NOT JUSTIFY RETAINING A CLOSURE ORIENTED RULE

The claim that open unless closed will authorize uncontrolled cross-country travel misstates the proposal. Existing designations remain effective until revised, applicable law continues to govern, and local officials retain closure and enforcement authority. The presumption guides future decisions concerning existing routes and access points; it does not authorize the arbitrary creation of new tracks.

The assertion that greater access necessarily produces greater resource damage likewise substitutes a national assumption for site-specific evidence. Route condition depends on soil, slope, drainage, hydrology, season, design, vehicle characteristics, maintenance, and user behavior. Concentrating all use on fewer routes can increase wear and eliminate alternate access. The final rule should require analysis of the actual condition and selection of the least restrictive effective response.

The argument that the Forest Service cannot afford access confuses current appropriations with statutory land-management purpose. Limited funding may justify priorities, temporary controls, phased work, or partnerships. It should not permanently remove a public use where Utah, a county, a club, or another partner can supply the necessary capacity.

Nor does local discretion eliminate consistent protection. Federal environmental statutes, governing forest plans, closure standards, mapping requirements, and public accountability remain applicable nationwide. What should vary is the management response to the landscape. Applying the same presumption to an alpine snowfield, a wet meadow, a dry plateau road, and a hardened trail would favor bureaucratic uniformity over competent resource administration.

REQUESTED COMPONENTS OF THE FINAL REGULATIONS

UPLA requests that the Forest Service adopt the proposed Travel Management Rule revisions in full and ensure that the final EIS, Record of Decision, and regulations accomplish the following:

1. **Evaluate the complete regulatory decision.** Analyze the foreseeable effects of the national presumptions, evidentiary standards, procedural thresholds, public-participation requirements,

mapping systems, exemptions, transition provisions, and transportation-system criteria established by the rule.

2. **Consider meaningfully different alternatives.** Evaluate immediate and prospective application of open unless closed, alternative definitions of existing routes, graduated revision procedures, alternative closure and reopening standards, transportation-network alternatives, use-specific provisions, and a structured access-recovery alternative.
3. **Adopt open unless closed as the governing presumption.** Establish a rebuttable presumption that existing roads, trails, trailheads, airfields, and other established access routes and points remain available for appropriate public use unless restriction is required by controlling law or supported by specific and defensible findings.
4. **Distinguish existing-route use from cross-country travel.** Clarify that the access presumption does not authorize indiscriminate travel through undisturbed terrain, unauthorized creation of new routes, entry into Wilderness, infringement upon valid existing rights, or use prohibited by another controlling law or instrument.
5. **Remove the former minimization criteria.** Eliminate the criteria derived from rescinded Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 from subparts B and C and prevent their continuation through substantially equivalent language, directives, or implementation practices.
6. **Return travel planning to the multiple-use framework.** Evaluate motorized recreation alongside watershed, wildlife, range, timber, active management, emergency response, and other congressionally recognized purposes without treating reduction of motorized access as an independent management objective.
7. **Require route-specific and proportionate closure findings.** Before imposing a material restriction, require the responsible official to identify the affected route or use, applicable legal authority, specific condition, supporting evidence, causal relationship, necessary geographic and temporal scope, and consequences of lost access.
8. **Require mitigation before long-term closure.** Direct responsible officials to consider maintenance, drainage repair, tread stabilization, hardened crossings, bridges, boardwalks, short relocation, seasonal controls, vehicle-class limitations, education, enforcement, monitoring, and partner-supported restoration before eliminating access.
9. **Require measurable review and reopening standards.** Ensure that every long-term restriction includes objective performance criteria, an expiration or review date, and a defined procedure for reopening, modification, or termination.
10. **Prevent emergency restrictions from becoming permanent through inertia.** Preserve immediate emergency authority while requiring written continuation findings, public notice, current evidence, and expedited review when a temporary order remains in effect after the initiating condition has passed.
11. **Evaluate transportation networks as connected systems.** Require analysis of loop connectivity, access to destinations, geographic redundancy, displaced travel, vehicle-class continuity, highway trailering, alternate ingress and egress, and the cumulative effects of segment-by-segment restrictions.
12. **Replace the minimum-road-system paradigm.** Require an adequate and appropriate transportation network supporting multiple use, recreation, wildfire suppression, fuels and vegetation treatment, evacuation, search and rescue, grazing administration, utilities, timber operations, law enforcement, watershed restoration, and post-fire recovery.

13. **Establish a no-net-loss objective for motorized opportunity.** Measure opportunity through route mileage, vehicle class, season, geographic distribution, network connectivity, and access to destinations rather than raw mileage alone.
14. **Identify provisions effective upon promulgation.** Specify which access presumptions, closure standards, public-participation protections, and review obligations take effect immediately and which require subsequent directives or unit-level implementation.
15. **Issue national implementation direction within 180 days.** Establish uniform procedures for clerical corrections, minor revisions, repaired-route reopenings, seasonal or vehicle-class adjustments, temporary restrictions, short relocations, recognition of omitted existing routes, and substantial network changes.
16. **Require a transition inventory for every Utah national forest.** Identify closed and highly restricted routes, the date and authority for each restriction, the original factual basis, current conditions, outstanding maintenance, jurisdictional interests, partner opportunities, mapping discrepancies, and the proposed review schedule.
17. **Complete priority reviews within three years.** Prioritize restrictions that fragmented trail systems, eliminated access to campsites or destinations, relied substantially upon the former minimization criteria, remain under expired emergency authority, impair management or emergency access, or can be resolved through mitigation or partner-supported work.
18. **Apply the revised standards to pending proceedings.** Require application of the final rule to pending, supplemental, remanded, and reopened travel-management decisions to the fullest extent legally permissible.
19. **Create a public route-nomination process.** Allow counties, Tribes, the State of Utah, permittees, recreation organizations, emergency responders, adjacent landowners, and members of the public to submit route evidence, maintenance commitments, mitigation proposals, and reopening requests beginning on the rule's effective date.
20. **Recognize reliable evidence of existing routes.** Consider historic maps, aerial imagery, state and county records, maintenance documentation, prior inventories, GPS data, photographs, ground verification, and credible evidence of longstanding use.
21. **Preserve jurisdictional and valid-existing-rights questions.** Clarify that omission from an MVUM does not independently establish that a route does not exist, determine ownership or jurisdiction, or extinguish a valid existing right.
22. **Preserve forest-level decision-making.** Allow Forest Supervisors and District Rangers to respond to local soils, hydrology, snow, wildfire history, vehicle characteristics, recreation patterns, maintenance capability, and partner resources while complying with national standards for evidence, transparency, and accountability.
23. **Maintain meaningful public participation.** Preserve proportionate notice, access to supporting information, opportunities to submit route-specific evidence, written responses to material information, Tribal consultation, and coordination with state and county governments.
24. **Use procedures proportionate to the decision.** Ensure that a clerical map correction, minor designation adjustment, repaired-route reopening, short relocation, or seasonal modification does not require the same process as permanent closure of a regional trail system.
25. **Modernize public mapping.** Integrate MVUM, OSVUM, closure-order, transportation-atlas, and field-condition information into current GIS-compatible systems while preserving printable maps,

georeferenced PDFs, offline data, accessible formats, archived editions, and consistent field signage.

26. **Restore practical dispersed-use access.** Authorize locally tailored corridors, distances, seasons, vehicle classes, and mapped access for dispersed camping, firewood collection, retrieval of legally harvested game, and comparable traditional uses without authorizing unrestricted cross-country travel.
27. **Adopt an evidence-based over-snow standard.** Recognize the protective function of adequate snow cover and frozen ground and authorize objective opening thresholds, adaptive seasonal management, and current public information while retaining restrictions supported by documented wildlife, watershed, avalanche, conflict, or safety conditions.
28. **Address emerging transportation technology objectively.** Evaluate Class 1 e-bikes, adaptive equipment, and low-powered mobility devices according to speed, power, weight, tread, operating characteristics, and observable effects rather than relying exclusively upon legacy classifications.
29. **Treat motorized connectivity as disability access.** Require route-density analysis, destination-access analysis, consultation with disabled users, and a written disability-access finding before approving a long-term closure, substantial seasonal restriction, or vehicle-class prohibition.
30. **Evaluate the 2.5-mile road-density benchmark.** Analyze and adopt, where legally and technically appropriate, the Outdoor Americans with Disabilities Act benchmark of 2.5 miles of authorized motorized road per square mile, together with a presumption against net loss in qualifying areas and restoration priority where existing density falls below that standard.
31. **Require comparable replacement access.** Where closure is unavoidable, require replacement access serving substantially the same destination, geographic area, recreation setting, season, network function, accessibility need, and appropriate vehicle classes within a defined period.
32. **Consider all available maintenance capacity.** Require consideration of Utah OHV grants, county participation, volunteer agreements, nonprofit organizations, recreation clubs, permittees, cooperative agreements, and other lawful partnerships before agency staffing or appropriations are used to justify continued closure.
33. **Evaluate economic and social effects with equal rigor.** Analyze local visitor spending, rural employment, family and community use, access to hunting and camping areas, volunteer investment, disability access, agency replacement costs, and the distributional consequences of route restrictions.
34. **Protect roads serving public-safety and management functions.** Evaluate wildfire response, fuels treatment, evacuation, search and rescue, utility access, grazing administration, vegetation management, and post-fire recovery before closing, decommissioning, or materially restricting a route.
35. **Provide a public-education and enforcement transition.** Require clear notice, consistent signage, current maps, reasonable correction periods, and education before punitive enforcement when regulatory changes or conflicting information could reasonably cause public confusion.
36. **Require annual implementation reporting.** Publish unit-level and national information identifying inventories completed; routes reviewed; miles reopened, added, relocated, seasonally managed, or retained as closed; vehicle-class changes; loops and destination connections restored; temporary orders resolved; nominations processed; partner contributions used; mapping updates completed; unmet deadlines; and corrective measures.

These provisions would preserve lawful protective authority while replacing a closure-centered system with a transparent, evidence-based, mitigation-first framework capable of advancing resource stewardship, meaningful public participation, multiple use, and responsible access.

CLOSING

UPLA supports adoption of the proposed revisions in full, subject to the clarifications and implementation requirements set forth in these comments. The Forest Service can protect natural and cultural resources while replacing a closure-centered regulatory structure with transparent, locally informed, and actively managed access. Existing public routes should begin from a presumption of responsible use, and restriction should follow only where controlling law or documented site-specific conditions justify it.

Meaningful reform requires more than revised policy language. The final rule must include enforceable transition deadlines, mitigation-first closure standards, periodic review, measurable reopening criteria, accurate public mapping, disability-access protections, meaningful public participation, intergovernmental coordination, and recognition of Utah's substantial state, county, nonprofit, and volunteer capacity. UPLA respectfully requests that the Forest Service address these recommendations in the EIS and incorporate them into the final regulations and Record of Decision.

Utah Public Lands Alliance would like to be considered an interested public for the Rule. Information can be sent to the following address and email address:

Rose Winn
Utah Public Lands Alliance
PO Box 833, St. George, UT 84771
rose@utahpla.com

Sincerely,

Rose Winn
Natural Resources Consultant
Utah Public Lands Alliance
559.862.6382

Loren Campbell
President
Utah Public Lands Association
909.499.3295

cc: Senator Mike Lee, Senator John Curtis, Congresswoman Celeste Maloy, Congressman Blake Moore, Congressman Burgess Owens, Governor Spencer Cox, PLPCO Director Redge Johnson, UPLA Trustees and Members

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