

NEWS RELEASE

USDA Forest Service -- Northern Region



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

FOREST SERVICE CROSS-COUNTRY TRAVEL POLICY TAKES EFFECT

Missoula, MT – If you drive a car, truck, all-terrain vehicle, or motorcycle on lands the Forest Service administers in Montana or parts of North and South Dakota, you can no longer drive cross-country; you must stay on existing roads and trails.

Effective July 1 motorized cross-country travel, previously allowed in many areas, is eliminated, with a few exceptions, Forest Service officials said. The policy affects any motorized, wheeled vehicle, but not snowmobiles.

The new rules apply to all the national forests in Montana as well as the Custer National Forest in South Dakota, and the Dakota Prairie Grasslands in North and South Dakota.

The requirement is good for the land and good for people, according to Kathleen McAllister, acting regional forester for the Forest Service's Northern Region.

“The new policy will protect fragile soils, riparian areas, vegetation and the wildlife species that live in these forest and grassland areas,” she said.

“It will also require drivers to use routes that are appropriate: if your vehicle is wider than the route is, that route is not for you,” she said. For example, under the new policy, motorcycles may use a single-track trail or road if it is open to motorized vehicles, but ATV's and other four-wheeled vehicles cannot use that single-track road or trail.

Several exceptions will apply. “Cross-country travel will continue to be allowed for military needs, fire suppression, search and rescue, or law enforcement vehicles in emergencies,” she said.

Forest users can also drive cross-country to campsites within 300 feet of existing roads or trails, after locating their campsite in a non-motorized fashion.

The decision to limit travel to existing routes was issued January 5, 2001 after an environmental impact statement on the issue was completed.

As part of the decision, national forests and grasslands will identify areas where more detailed, local travel plans should be developed.

McAllister said that the new policy does not change existing road and trail regulations.

“We encourage folks to check locally and obey the signs that are posted. We’ll need everyone’s cooperation to ensure the success of the new policy,” she said.

She suggested users contact the appropriate forest or grassland office for additional information regarding the new requirement and current travel information.

Additional information is also available on the internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/> under the heading “Off-Highway Vehicle – New Travel Regulations (MT, ND, SD).”

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Note to the Media: Please contact the local forest PAO in your area for additional information that they can provide regarding the surrounding national forest.