

Groups appeal forest plan for managing motor vehicles

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At least 22 groups and individuals have filed appeals over the Santa Fe National Forest plan for managing motorized travel in the forest. Both environmentalists and off-road vehicle users have appealed the plan.

The appeals were sent to Corbin L. Newman Jr., the Southwest regional forester.

The travel management plan is required from each national forest under a federal mandate, which found unregulated and cross-country travel by all-terrain vehicles, off-road vehicles and other motorized vehicles was a major cause of damage to public lands. Managers for each forest came up with their own plans after conducting public hearings and researching existing roads and trail systems.

The Santa Fe National Forest plan would reduce routes for motorized vehicles by more than half, but also would recognize some unofficial trails created by single-track dirt bike riders. It also creates corridors for hunters to drive off the road to pick up game. The Forest Service is producing maps to show all the motorized travel routes and when they will be open.

One of the appeals was filed jointly by the Center for Biological Diversity, the Santa Fe-based WildEarth Guardians, the Sierra Club and Archaeology Southwest.

The groups recognized the agency's "considerable efforts" to develop a comprehensive plan that would balance the diverse interests of the public with the environment. Still, the groups believe in several instances the Forest Service failed to follow the law and policy in the plan. Among other issues, the groups think more routes should have been closed to motorized use in the Jemez Mountains.