

Decision Memo

Descanso District Unauthorized Route Decommissioning 2014

USDA Forest Service
Descanso Ranger District, Cleveland National Forest
San Diego County, California
T16S. R5E. Sec. 20, 21, 28. SBM
T16S. R4E. Sec. 25, 31, 36. SBM

Background

The Travel Management Regulations of 2005 required National Forests to designate all roads, trails and areas open to motorized vehicles, excluding currently designated Forest System Roads and Trails. The Forests were to complete an inventory and environmental analysis of all non-System roads and trails and produce a decision on what roads, trails and other areas would be authorized for motor vehicle use.

The Cleveland National Forest (NF) finalized its authorized motor vehicle use designations in a Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact in November of 2008. For a variety of reasons, including impacts to riparian conservation areas or endangered species habitat, many routes being considered during the public participation and scoping process were dropped from consideration and recommended instead for restoration.

In following with the recommendation to restore and stabilize unauthorized roads and trails, the Descanso Ranger District of the Cleveland NF has selected a limited number of unauthorized routes to restore in 2014.

Decision

It is my decision to implement recommendations that several roads and trails, not designated as authorized for motor vehicle use, be restored and stabilized. It is my decision to restore and stabilize approximately three (3) miles of unauthorized routes on the Descanso Ranger District in the vicinity of the Buckman Springs Road exit off Interstate-8, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. This decision does not authorize the decommissioning of the route labeled "UND 509," which has been removed from the project to be considered for decommissioning at a later time. The decommissioning of the remainder of routes shown in Figures 1 and 2 will result in a more natural appearing landscape and reduced environmental impacts to water, soil, and biological resources.

The action to restore and stabilize the identified areas will involve loosening compacted soils using a method called Extreme Surface Roughening (sometimes referred to as Pocking). This method is used to intercept and trap sediment on a microscale. Roughening also collects moisture, which improves vegetation establishment and consequently prevents erosion. This technique involves the use of a backhoe or trackhoe shovel to create microbasins for extreme surface roughening. The trackhoe shovel is used to dig, poke, or push basins with a minimum depth of eighteen inches.

Figure 1. Unauthorized routes in the vicinity of Long Valley Loop Road.

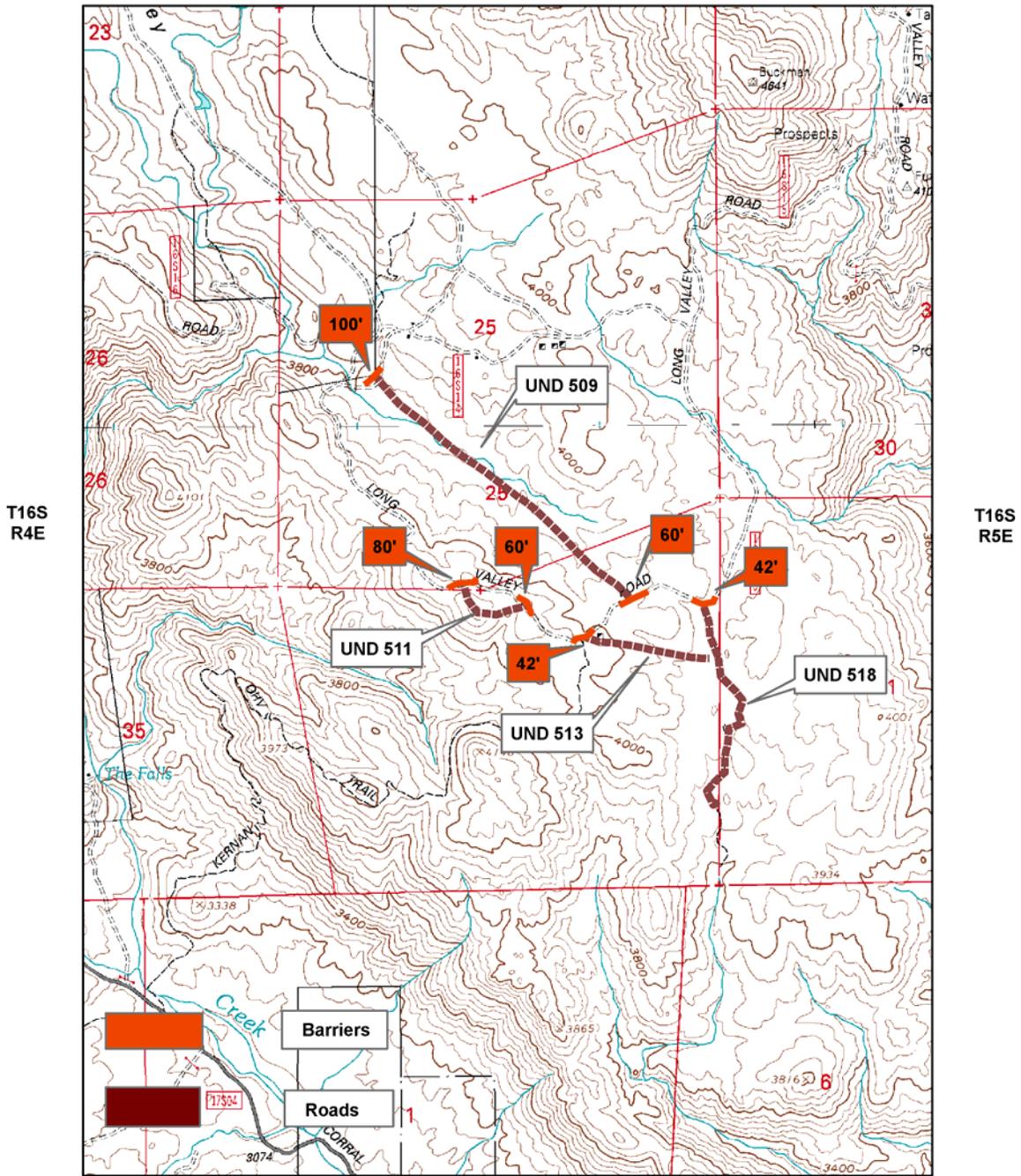
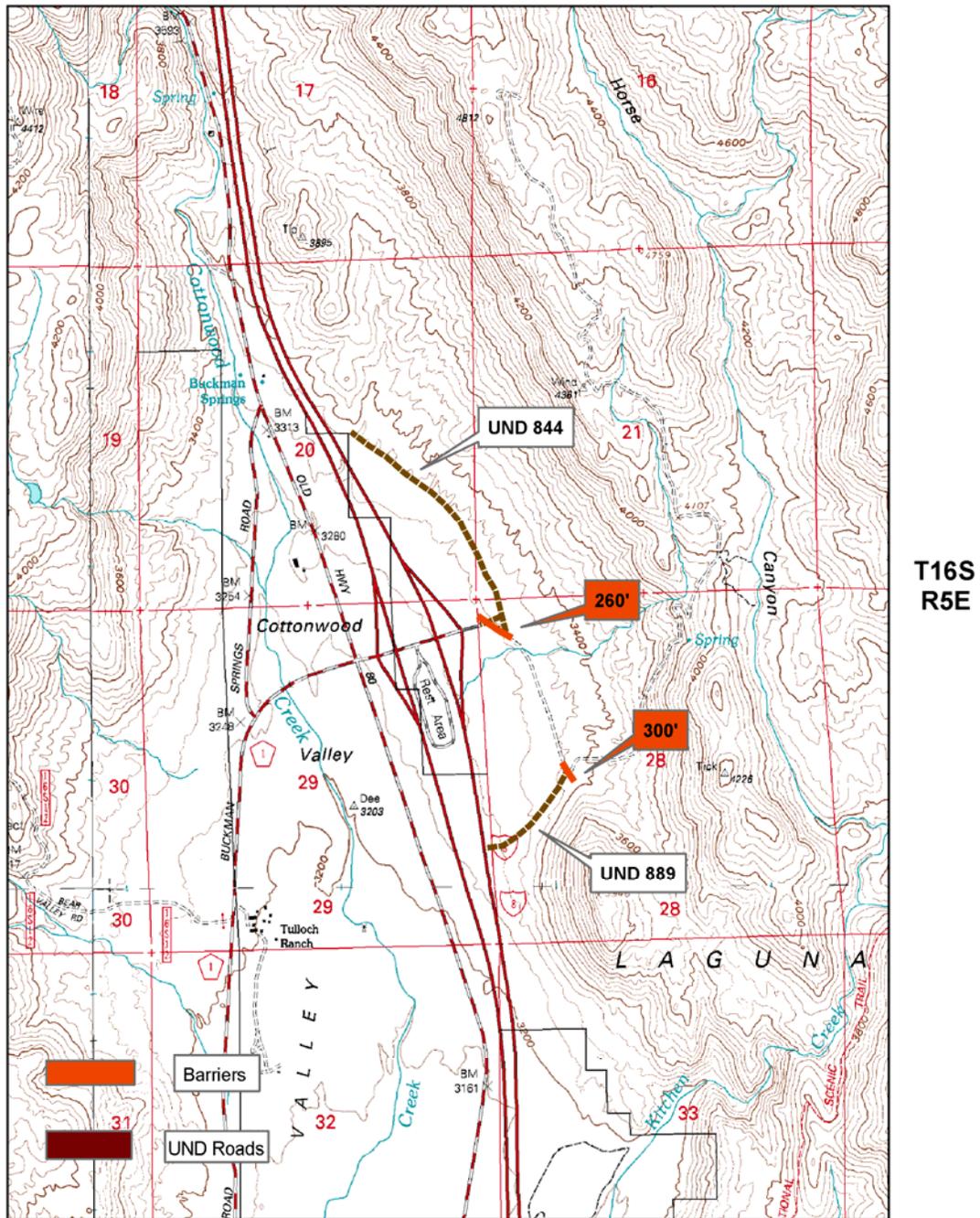


Figure 2. Unauthorized routes in the vicinity of Buckman Springs Road and Interstate-8.



Upon completion of Pocking, steel pipe rail barriers will be installed at the entrance points of the unauthorized roads or trails to reduce the chance that motorized vehicles will enter these restored sites. Mechanical equipment (usually bobcat) will be used to auger holes. Steel pipe barriers will be inserted in auger holes and cement will be poured to secure barriers. Visit http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/nepa_project_exp.php?project=43149 for further information on Pocking and barrier installation.

The following design features apply to activities authorized by this decision:

- Should any previously unrecorded cultural resources be encountered during implementation of this project, all work should immediately cease in that area and the Cleveland NF Heritage Program Manager (HPM) be notified immediately. Work may resume after approval by the HPM, provided any recommended Standard Protection Measures are implemented. Should any cultural resources become damaged in unanticipated ways by activities proposed in this project; the steps described for inadvertent effects in the Regional Programmatic Agreement for National Historic Preservation Act Section 106 compliance will be followed.
- At the Buckman Springs sites, the routes will be rehabilitated and barriers installed during daylight hours when arroyo toads are not active. Soils at the project sites are compacted and not suitable for toads to burrow in. Project work at these sites will generally occur after November 1 and before July 1 of following year. There is a possibility that juvenile toads could be present in the work area, during daytime hours, after July 1. For any construction work that occurs between July 1 and November 1, a biological monitor will be present to remove toads from the work area.

The following Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be used to protect water quality:

Region 5 BMPs from R5 FSH 2509.22—Soil and Water Conservation Handbook Ch. 10 (2011)

- BMP 2.6 - Road Decommissioning (pp. 104-106) applies to decommissioned roads and trails.
- BMP 2.11 - Equipment Refueling and Servicing (pp.118-119) applies to equipment used during project implementation.
- BMP 2.13 - Erosion Control Plan (pp. 122-129) applies to all ground disturbing activities.
- BMP 7.4 - Forest and Hazardous Substance Spill Prevention Control and Countermeasure Plan (p. 206) applies to all management activities involving mechanical equipment.

National BMPs from *National Best Management Practices for Water Quality Management on National Forest System Lands* (2012)

- AqEco-1. Aquatic Ecosystem Improvement and Restoration Planning (pp. 19-20) applies to decommissioning in RCAs and restoring stream crossings.
- AqEco-2. Operations in Aquatic Ecosystems (pp. 21-23) applies to road decommissioning and ground disturbing work in RCAs.
- Road-6. Road Storage and Decommissioning (pp. 115-117) applies to decommissioned roads and trails.
- Road-10. Equipment Refueling and Servicing (pp. 123-124) applies to all activities involving mechanical equipment.

Based on environmental analysis and input from Cleveland NF resource specialists, I have determined that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or an environmental assessment (EA) because it meets the requirements of a categorical exclusion as listed in 36 CFR 220.6(e)(18):

“Activities that restore, rehabilitate, or stabilize lands occupied by roads and trails, excluding National Forest System roads and National Forest System trails to a more natural condition that may include removing, replacing, or modifying drainage structures and ditches, reestablishing vegetation, reshaping natural contours and slopes, reestablishing drainage-ways, or other activities that would restore site productivity and reduce environmental impacts. Examples include but are not limited to:

(i) Decommissioning a road that is no longer a National Forest System road to a more natural state by restoring natural contours and removing construction fills, loosening compacted soils, revegetating the roadbed and removing ditches and culverts to reestablish natural drainage patterns;

(ii) Restoring an unauthorized trail to a natural state by reestablishing natural drainage patterns, stabilizing slopes, reestablishing vegetation, and installing water bars; and

(iii) Installing boulders, logs, and berms on an unauthorized road segment to promote naturally regenerated grass, shrub, and tree growth.”

Specialist reviews for Hydrology, Soils, Wildlife, Botany and Heritage Resources were completed. On the basis of documentation found in the project record, there are no extraordinary circumstances related to the project that warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or an EIS. In particular, the project will not affect Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species; floodplains, wetlands or municipal watersheds; Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas; inventoried roadless areas; research natural areas; American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites; or Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas.

With regard to a public comment suggesting that these routes should not be decommissioned due to provisions of Revised Statute 2477, the County of San Diego verified that it has asserted no such claim for these particular routes.

Public Involvement

The proposal to restore and stabilize unauthorized roads and trails on the Descanso Ranger District was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on November 14, 2013. A legal notice of availability of the draft Decision Memo for public comment was published in the *San Diego Union-Tribune* on December 5, 2013, to begin a 30-day comment period pursuant to 36 CFR 215 regulations. Thirteen comments were received during this period.

In addition, the 2005 Travel Management Regulations required all National Forests to inventory and complete an environmental analysis of all Non-Forest System Roads and Trails to produce a decision on what roads and trails would be authorized for motorized use. During 2007 and 2008,

public scoping, through letters and public meetings, was conducted to comply with the Travel Management Regulations. Through the public involvement and scoping process, several alternatives were developed and analyzed. A Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact was signed in November of 2008. While there was no site-specific environmental analysis conducted on decommissioning those roads and trails not designated for motorized vehicle use, throughout the process it was made clear that such roads and trails should be considered for restoration. The project file is available at the Cleveland National Forest Supervisor's Office.

Findings Required by Other Laws

My decision to decommission the identified unauthorized routes is consistent with the desired condition of the Cleveland NF as described in the Land Management Plan ("LMP") and as required by the National Forest Management Act. Goal 3.1 of the LMP directs the Cleveland NF to remove roads and trails that have been determined to be unnecessary as identified through National Environmental Policy Act analysis (LMP, Part 1, pp. 34 and 35). The LMP instructs the Cleveland NF to reduce the number of inventoried unclassified roads. The LMP also instructs the Cleveland NF to maintain or improve the integrity of riparian conservation areas (LMP, Part 1, pg. 41) as well as to ensure that habitats for federally listed species are conserved and that listed species are recovered, or moving toward recovery (LMP, Part 1, pg. 45).

The LMP contains program strategies and tactics that the Cleveland NF may use to progress toward meeting the desired conditions and goals discussed above. Among these are:

1. Maintain and improve habitat for fish, wildlife, and plants, including those designated as management indicator species (LMP, Part 2, pg. 90).
2. Manage riparian conservation areas to maintain or improve conditions for riparian-dependent species (LMP, Part 2, pg. 95).
5. Decommission roads and trails that have been determined to be unnecessary for incorporation into the road or trail systems, through site-specific analysis (LMP, Part 2, pg. 108).

In addition, the project is fully consistent with the Endangered Species Act and the Clean Water Act, as documented in the project record.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the March 19, 2012 order issued by the U. S. District Court for the Eastern District of California in Case No. CV F11-679LJO DLB.

A written appeal, including attachments, must be postmarked or received within 45 days after the date that a legal notice of this decision is published in *The San Diego Union-Tribune*. Electronic appeals in common formats (.doc, .rtf, .pdf or .txt) may be submitted to: objections-cleveland@fs.fed.us with Subject: DRD Decommissioning 2014. Appeals may also be faxed to (858) 673-6192 to the attention of "APPEAL: DRD Decommissioning 2014," sent by mail to the following address, or hand-delivered during normal business hours of 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding holidays:

Forest Supervisor
ATTN: Appeals
Cleveland National Forest
10845 Rancho Bernardo Road, Suite 200
San Diego, CA 92127

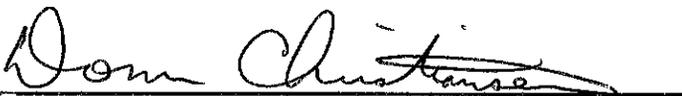
Persons or organizations who meet the requirements of 36 CFR 215.13 may appeal this decision. Appeals must meet content requirements of 36 CFR 215.14.

Implementation Date

Pursuant to 36 CFR 215.9, if no appeal is filed within the 45-day time period following the publication of a legal notice of this decision in the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, the decision may be implemented on, but not before, the 5th business day following the close of the appeal-filing period. If an appeal is filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15th business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

Contact Person

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1/31/14

Date

District Ranger

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