UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
REGION IX
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San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

May 5, 2008

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Subject: Final Environmental Impact Statement for Eldorado National Forest Public Wheeled Motorized Travel Management Plan, Alpine, Amador, El Dorado and Placer Counties, CA (CEQ# 20080131)

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reviewed the above-referenced document pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and our NEPA review authority under Section 309 of the Clean Air Act.

EPA commends the Forest Service for their efforts to address the many challenges inherent in developing a balanced Public Wheeled Motorized Travel Management Plan that also responds to recreational and resource management demands. We acknowledge that the Travel Management Plan process is a positive step in addressing resource impacts from motorized uses.

We are pleased that the Forest Service is working to address the public concern regarding adequate implementation, monitoring, and enforcement. We support the proposal to work collaboratively with public stakeholders to develop a public education strategy; public volunteer strategy; road and trail condition monitoring process; process for considering additions, changes, restoration, blockading or decommissioning of routes; and a strategy for designating areas for vehicle use of dispersed camping areas.

The Preferred Alternative, Modified B, addresses many of our concerns by reducing routes through meadows and within at-risk watersheds, prohibiting motorized use within the Caples Creek Recommended Wilderness Area, and providing a commitment to the above implementation, monitoring, and enforcement strategy. Alternative Modified B would provide the highest number of miles of access among the action alternatives including 4.1 miles of routes through meadows and continued access into high elevation inventoried roadless areas. Thus, we continue to have concerns regarding effective enforcement and potential effects on water quality and sensitive resources.

Achieving a balance between public access and the protection of sensitive resources is a challenge. To continue a high level of access while ensuring sensitive habitats are protected, we continue to recommend eliminating routes in sensitive and easily damaged high elevation habitat and focusing initial monitoring, enforcement, public education and volunteerism on areas of known adverse resource impacts. We recommend the Forest Service commit to this approach in the Record of Decision.

We appreciate the opportunity to review this FEIS. Please send one hard copy of the final Record of Decision to the address above (mail code: CED-2). If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 972-3846 or Laura Fujii, the lead reviewer for this project. Laura can be reached at (415) 972-3852 or fujii.laura@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Laura Fujii for

Nova Blazej, Manager
Environmental Review Office

cc: Jason Nedlo, Team Leader, Eldorado National Forest
Steve Thompson, California Operations, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Kenneth D. Landau, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board