

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

JD—Jim DeTro, BOCC, District 3  
AH—Andy Hover, BOCC, vice-chair, District 1  
CB—Chris Branch, BOCC, chair, District 2  
LJ—Lalena Johns-clerk to the Commissioners  
VW—Victoria Wilkins, Public Affairs Officer, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest  
Chris Furr—District Ranger, Methow Ranger District  
KGW—Kari Grover-Wier, District Ranger for Chelan and Entiat Ranger Districts  
SK—Sendi Kalcic—NEPA Planner, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest  
AC—Aaron Culp, Undersheriff  
LR—Laura Rice, Chief Deputy, Sheriff's Office  
JT—Josh Thomson, County Engineer

These notes were taken by an Okanogan County Watch volunteer. Every attempt is made to be accurate. Notes are verbatim when possible, and otherwise summarized or paraphrased. Note takers comments or clarifications are in italics. These notes are published at <https://www.countywatch.org/> and are not the official county record of the meeting. For officially approved minutes, which are normally published at a later time, see <https://okanogancounty.org/Commissioners/Minutes%202014/March%204,%202014.htm>

The time stamps refer to the times on the AV Capture archive of the meeting on this date at <https://okanogancounty.org/avcapture.html> . To locate items in real time, the clock on the wall in the AV Capture screen can be helpful.

*Summary of significant discussions:*

*2:30:40—Introductions and Forest Service employee Sendi Kalcic makes a Power Point presentation entitled Motorized Travel Management Planning: Past, Present and Future in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to the Commissioners.*

*2:51:05—Commissioners begin to discuss the plan with regard to WATV use on Forest Service Roads.*

**2:30:40**—Presentation and Discussion of the Forest Service's Travel Management Plan

VW—I'm the Public Affairs Officer. We're happy to be here. Kristin Bail, Forest Supervisor, will join us about 30 minutes late due to a last minute meeting.

Chris Furr, Commissioners, Aaron Culp, Josh Tomson and Laura Rice introduce themselves.

Sendi Kalcic and Kari Grover-Wier introduce themselves.

CF—We're looking forward to giving you an update and also looking forward to see how we can work together.

VW—SK will give us some background.

SK—Gives a Power Point presentation—Motorized Travel Management Planning: Past, Present and Future in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

--Began in earnest in 2006. Mostly completed in 2013 but paused because of advice from the Regional Office to focus our analysis.

--In 2014, regrouped and began analysis of Travel Management Rule Subpart B, which is the designation of roads, trails and areas for motor vehicle use. We're looking to apply that consistently across the board.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

- In September 2014 and into 2015, released information for public scoping, which includes a need for action and a proposed action.
- March 2015 the Forest completed Subpart A forest-wide. The report outlines existing road systems and identifies what opportunities there are to retain the road. Identify roads that may be unnecessary.
- 2016, public comment period on the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) focused on eliminating cross-county travel and establishing 300 foot dispersed camping corridor. Included 350 miles for wheeled all-terrain vehicles (WATV) which is from Washington legislation in 2013 establishing that class of vehicle. 350 miles of WATV roads were also included in that draft EA. A lot of interest with thousands of letters and comments.
- 2018 the Pacific Northwest Regional Office identified changes to the Draft EA.
- 2019 the planning effort was paused to incorporate subsequent changes to the proposed action.
- 2020 Tonasket Ranger District (RD) was transferred to Colville National Forest so that RD was no longer part of the project.
- In the past several months we've had conversations with staff, regional office staff, etc., to try to get additional information and insight to the history of the project, and to make sure we understand the compliance requirements for travel management and (*unintelligible*). Doing this to better understand and identify options and tasks for moving forward. What the tradeoffs may be.
- The National Forest has decided to complete planning at a smaller scale, a landscape scale. Generally looking at the RD boundary which generally follows the county boundary line. So this pivots from when we were doing this Forest-wide. But the boundaries don't always align perfectly, so we will be flexible and paying attention where roads & trails cross into other counties. Example—the Methow overlaps with the Okanogan, Whatcom, Skagit and Chelan counties. Majority of the Methow is in Okanogan. So much work has been done already that we're proposing to utilize our previous analysis (up to 2016) and also using associated documentation.
- Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is approximately 3,800,000 acres. Methow RD is 740,000 acres (not counting what's in Wilderness Areas, where motorized travel is already banned). Our most recent data shows 4X4 trails and ATV trails are zero. And for mixed-use roads there's less than 1 mile. Motorcycle mixed-use roads are about 10 miles. Total length maintenance level roads in the Methow RD is 1,600 miles. (Maintenance level 1-5.)
- The pivot will really allow us to engage the counties and we'll be able to focus on the landscape. We'll have less data needed. Also scheduled time savings. We'll have one less planning decision to be made, (out of three).
- We're at a point to reengage with key partners to discuss scope, scale and approach of the project. Seeking input from all to see where to start, level of engagement and get feedback on our approach.
- Staggered starts for the different districts. Two years process for each of four districts. Begin a district in 2022, we'd be done in 2023. So for all four districts, we'd have a final decision and completed National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by 2026.
- The Plan will amend the existing forest plan and will close the forest to cross-country travel.
- The Plan will not address the travel analysis (completed in 2015), address over-snow motorized travel (which is included in Subplan C, a separate process) and non-motorized trails. Subpart B is strictly for identifying motorized travel—identifying a class of vehicle and any timing restrictions on their use. Current non-motorized trails are not covered under this rule.

**2:51:05**—AH—for the Methow RD, how many miles of motorized trails are there?

SK—Best data we have is 4X4 trail is 0. ATV trails is 0. Motorcycle trails is 40.89 miles (AH—sounds about right) and motorcycle mixed use road (where highway legal and motorcycle only ) is 10.3 miles.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

AH—So as commissioners, when we look at this, you're talking about 50 miles of motorized trails because you're not going to address outside of this—like opening trails for motorized use. Correct?

SK—We'll look at motorized roads and trails.

CF—Here's an example, AH. We could take road and add WATV to an existing road with this analysis.

AH—So in the Methow RD, there's just 50 miles of motorized trails. You're not analyzing all of the non-motorized trails to determine if they could be opened for motorized use on trails. Correct? All you're looking at is motorized trails to see if they should be closed for motorized use. Is that true?

SK—Yeah. Correct. Basically two categories we're looking at: Official motorized roads and trails (have a maintenance level and are currently in our system). Also looking at unofficial (user-created) routes that have become established. We'll also look at them.

AH—So basically you'll have to do analysis on trails the FS has allowed to occur and determine if they're going to be included in the motorized trails. And also look at the motorized trails you have and determine if you need to stop that use on those trails.

SK—Can you repeat that?

AH—You'll be looking at motorized trails that exist on the maps and seeing if you're going to close any of those?

SK—Yes. For motorized trails we'd look at current use and other factors to see what to do—retained, closed, etc.

AH—For roads, the 1,600 miles of road, you'd determine if any need to be closed to licensed vehicle travel because I assume they're all open to licensed vehicle travel.

SK—Discusses Maintenance Level 1 roads, which are not open to licensed vehicle travel. Level 2-5 are what we're talking about.

AH—Then you'd be looking at how many miles of roads you could open to WATVs?

SK—Yes. That's what we need your input on. They were part of the previous NEPA analysis, so we can consider them in this process.

JD—I've been vocal in the past about your three and four digit system roads. Discussed with people doing the travel plan who took on the attitude that we need to close all these roads and then we'll go back and have an engineer evaluate them to see if we can open them up. I want to go on the record right now that's totally unacceptable. You can't do that. The reason is all three and four digit system roads in the Okanogan National Forest were engineered to county specifications. They're already been engineered to county specs and it's just an effort to close roads and then they'll go back one by one and open them. We know that will never happen. If they get them closed, it'll be decades before they go back to do the analysis to open them again. When I was a smoke jumper in the summer, but I didn't have enough money for college, after the jump season was over, I'd go work for the Okanogan County Forest Service Engineering crew. They engineered those 3 & 4 digit roads to county specs. Chris (Furr), I think I've vocalized this to you before, but I wanted to remind you of that.

CF—Yes. I remember. And through this process, we don't have roads with WATV use authorized. So this will be more of an effort to see what folks see as an opportunity for WATV use and add that to travel management.

AH—Chris, Some of the documents we'd want the FS to consider is #1: that backroads study. Because there are all the different routes people use for emergencies. But we've been holding off completing our own analysis for WATV use on county roads. We've got Commissioner Districts 1 & 3 done, but not District 2, my district, because a lot of those roads hinge on what will happen with the FS and what roads you'll open. In the Methow RD, the county roads are fairly short, but they connect with longer FS routes where I can drive almost from Havillah to Mazama on dirt roads. The planning effort has to be one where we're all looking at maps, and if the FS doesn't want all roads that cars can now use opened to WATV (and I think they should) then the planning effort needs to want to make the best rides

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

possible for people using county roads and FS roads that are maintainable and usable. Especially now since the Tonasket RD is now in the Colville NF and we'll probably have a bunch of Methow RD roads that meet up at the district lines and how are those going to be addressed?

CF—Excellent point. County roads and FS roads need to be coordinated.

AH—Just for myself, I want to be as engaged as possible—providing supporting data, etc., to allow as much motorized travel on established roads without overdoing it.

VW—This is the level of discussion we're looking for. We recognize we need a high level of engagement to be a success. One reason to have smaller planning units. We can work together with timing of the discussions. We need to decide which county to start with.

AH—Okanogan!

VW—Are there factors to better time our efforts we need to know about? We need good relations among the groups.

AH—We have a trails collaborative. We have the ATV club. We're waiting on you, so I think we should be first on the list.

*(Someone chuckles.)*

CB—That was the discussion, especially for AH's district. Another piece for me, I have a concern about the ability to manage ATV use, and I don't think that a few trails/roads will pass muster because they go down stream beds, etc. Not many, but there are some. Also, a concern for those using non-motorized trails that are used by WATVs. Separation of uses can be useful and if they have expectations of being on a non-motorized trail, they should have that expectation satisfied. Discusses TREAD Maps. *(BOCC discussed TREAD Maps during the April 19, 2021 meeting.)* Very useful information about what's allowed on what trails.

AH—Are you talking about trails or roads?

CB—Road and trail systems.

AH—We've only got about 50 miles of motorized trails and it's OK. But you already have an established use of motorized vehicles on those roads.

CB—Also, motorcycle use vs. ATV use, I have trouble with figuring out why there's a difference. Disparity needs to be sorted out.

AH—If I have a dirt bike with a license plate on it, I can go on every single FS road there is. But if I have a car that didn't pass the EPA standards and doesn't have a WATV license, I can't.

CB—We agree that consistence is good. We're aware of illegal use of ATVs and the damage they can do when they don't follow the rules.

AH—But we've also done mitigation, putting fines on off-trail travel, signage, etc.

JD—Also been vocal about all of the communities—ATV use, bicycle use, x-c skiing, whatever. Asking them to police their own people and not depend on the sheriff's department.

**3:17:14**—CB—Only 15 minutes left so do law enforcement and Public Works have any comments?

JT—From Public Works side, the point has been addressed because we don't know yet what county roads will connect with FS roads.

CB—We have some roads we think we think we want to open but if FS roads don't open, they're hard to justify. And it goes the other way, too. If the FS is looking at roads to close and they people in the counties are using them, that should be taken in. That Backroads study AH mentioned might be helpful for that.

AH—There's a sweet spot somewhere between ban it all and open it all. But a road system that works, with a parking lot to offload the vehicles and actually go for a ride. And we'll both need county roads and FS roads to make that happen.

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

CF—Engagement you brought up with collaborative groups and the local clubs is going to be key to getting started. We have to have those guys engaged and bought it.

CB—You guys (FS people) will be referee.

AH—So when are you going to start with Okanogan County?

VW—Engagement among stake holders works well together and we don't have to be the referee. If we're the referee, it means one group is working against another. If you guys have an established public outreach process you used with initial assessment of WATV routes, that would be interesting to see what that was.

AH—We can do that all day long. We can get a group of people to look over maps. We can do that.

CF—I'll add to VW statement. With Twisp Restoration as an example of trying to add WATV routes. Smaller landscape scale. 97-98% of the 1,000 comments were against the routes. When VW talks about talking about trying to get people to the same page, and we know it's more complex in the Methow. We know we've got some work to do.

AH—Trying to plug in WATV routes in a timber sale is not a good idea. People think we're just trying to stuff it in under the radar. It'll work out far better as a program to put together a plan to know where the routes will be.

CF—To be fair, it's not just a timber sale. We were looking at level 3 roads.

AH—I just don't see your comment it as a criticism, but we don't know if the 98% of the commenters were from Okanogan County. But if we get buy-in with the local trails collaborative, it'll go a lot smoother.

CF—Understood.

**3:25:55**—CB—Anyone else?

AC—From a planning standpoint, the Sheriff's Office doesn't have a lot to contribute. We're responsible for some public safety issues and criminality in the forest. Vehicle traffic in the NF isn't part of our purview. Crisis response, search and rescue and criminal response—we have an interest in those things.

AH—Anything else from the FS folks.

CB—Or more questions?

VW—We just wanted to know what you guys wanted us to know. We wanted an initial sense to see if we're on the right track. Start the conversation.

CB—Does the plan address the temporary opening and closing of roads. Some people need to access fire wood and use not-so-formal roads. Would that access be changing?

CF—We are looking at transportation as a whole, and that would be important input.

CB—And maybe even just during the wood cutting season.

VW—We need to pay attention to roads with wood cutting.

CB—There are big gaps in the time line where it looks like nothing is being done on the plan. We're in court with this about our Comprehensive Plan.

AH—We just want to be first and know when it starts. Then we'll start getting everybody together to have a conversation about it.

CF—Duly noted.

AH—Thanks for giving us the presentation and engage with us. More critical to have local, state and federal working together.

CF—We appreciate your time and look forwards to more discussion with you after we've finished this initial round of talks.

FS people leave the Zoom call.

CB—to people still in the room—Any comments?

Board of Okanogan County Commissioners  
Monday, May 24, 2021 PM

LR—(*She is not speaking very loudly*) Everyone is all over the forest with their ATVs. Talking about an ATV jamboree. It would be nice to have it officially....Motorcycle vs UTV and they're all licensed.

CB—Just stay where they're supposed to be. Don't go cross-country.

JD—It's too bad that Washington State has convoluted this whole process and made it so difficult. We go to Wallace, ID and MT and they don't have any problems over there.

AH—To be honest, I want motorized travel, but not everywhere.

JD—The way they've structured it in ID and MT they don't have all this cross-country travel. They didn't push them off the roads. It's just a pleasure to go there. Everybody's happy. We ride roads.

AH—I could drive my VW Baja Bug on any FS road, but I can't drive a WATV,

JD—Even though you can buy on-road and off-road tabs.

CB—Biggest difference is that when I'm on an ATV, I know that it can go "there" and it's really hard for a lot of people not to drive "there". If everybody was responsible, no problem.

AH—Burn bans and people burn pallets.

LR—Comes down to the fact that it's outdated. The stuff now is all updated.

JD—A guy told me last weekend and had a bad experience with Homeland Security on the Chopaka Road by the border. I told him—Don't you know that road is closed just so you don't have a bad experience? He didn't know it was closed, but it's his responsibility to know.

JT, AC and LR leave.

Commissioners decide to correct minutes and do vouchers tomorrow. Adjourn for the day.