

Recreation Outdoors Coalition

Roads and Trails as Recreational Route Systems

Successful recreational travel management requires an integrated system of routes. Individual routes when considered alone cannot meet the diverse requirements, needs and demands of public land stakeholders or the mission of managing agencies.

There are basic concepts, practices, procedures and proven techniques that are common to successful recreation travel programs worldwide. As society changes and land use issues continue, more ideas will evolve.

The concepts, practices and ideas presented here form the framework for success. Individual projects may require creativity to insure successful outcomes. We can meet the challenge.

Successful Travel Route Systems Must Provide:

- An acceptable level of resource impact
- Sustainable routes
- Satisfaction of participants (fun)
- Active and responsible management by the agency

The Planning Process Requires:

- A conceptual plan - what can be provided, where are the opportunities, who will use the routes, etc.
- Resource inventory - identify potential constraints of the area
- Route inventory - authorized and unauthorized routes, location and condition
- Planned system of routes - adequate mileage, dispersal, range of challenge, destinations, loops, etc.
- Development and documentation of Road and Trail Management Objectives (RMOs/TMOs) - how will routes be managed, maintained and monitored?

Elements Necessary for Success:

- Resource protection
- Visitor safety
- Satisfaction of participants - enough mileage and “time in the saddle”

- Clear, concise and documented management objectives
- Loop routes
- Desirable destinations
- Variety of experience, challenge and difficulty
- Variety of route widths, single track, ATV, 4x4
- Access from trailheads, staging areas, campgrounds, communities
- Access to goods and services
- Youth and beginner loops and areas
- Play areas for non-trail based interests and activities (training, education, play riding)
- Accurate and current maps and handouts
- A sign system coordinated with maps
- Active management, agency presence and involvement
- Cost effective operation and management
- Utilization of stewardship and volunteer agreements, cost share agreements and concessionaire permits
- Use of existing roads and trails where conceptual plan goals can be met
- Change classification of roads to trails and reconfigure to meet management objectives (challenge, variety, etc.)

Shared Use Roads:

- Roads have two different roles - transportation and recreation
- As a transportation facility, roads provide quick legal access
- As recreation facility, roads are part of the overall system, contribute to the recreation experience, disperse use, and provide vital connections between trail segments
- Roads can be easily downgraded to lower maintenance levels to enhance use as a recreation facility and reduce maintenance costs
- Roads maintenance levels can be temporarily raised during periods of commodity haul or for other reasons, then dropped back to the lower level
- Roads can be legally converted into trails, thereby changing use levels and patterns and lowering maintenance requirements
- Roads can serve special purposes such as featured long distance loop and destination opportunities (the Lassen Backcountry Byway, Share The Dream Trail and California Backcountry Discovery Trails are examples)