



Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 08-3

Restoring and Maintaining a Sustainable Road System on National Forest Lands

A. BACKGROUND

1. We expect our National Forests to provide myriad public values including timber management, mining, outdoor recreation, and clean water. Clean water is vital for irrigation, domestic water supply, recreation instream flows for fish and wildlife and other ecosystem benefits. The capacity of our National Forests to provide clean water is diminished because of deteriorating roads that pollute streams with sediment. The increasing intensity and frequency of severe storms only exacerbates the problem.
2. Many National Forest Roads were established to provide access for logging and mining, and the road system was built and maintained reliant on revenue from these activities. Over time these roads also provide access for outdoor recreation and emergency response. Although the emphasis of roads on National Forest lands has changed from logging to outdoor recreation there is still a need to maintain a sustainable number of roads.
3. The decline of logging activities in modern times has led to a reduction in the revenue source for road maintenance and upgrades. Consequently, many roads are not being adequately maintained, nor have they been upgraded to present day standards including assuring adequate fish passage. This has resulted in an unsustainable road system in the Western states that is literally falling apart, becoming a risk to property, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and access for recreation and in-holdings.
4. In areas of the West, some progress is being made. Partners in watershed management are working to inventory the current roads system, identify roads that are still needed, establish and maintain fish passage at stream crossings, assure roads will withstand high intensity floods, and recognize roads no longer needed or too expensive to maintain.
5. Western Governors recognize that restoration and maintenance of our National Forest roads can provide long-term and sustainable jobs in rural communities while maintaining and producing a myriad of public values.

B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT

1. Western Governors support a sustainable roads system in our National Forests that will serve rural communities and the public by providing rural jobs and access for logging, mining, outdoor recreation, emergency response and clean water for irrigation, domestic water supply and in-stream flows for fish and wildlife.
2. Western Governors believe that existing National Forest system roads should be restored and maintained so they are in compliance with federal and state clean water and species protections laws.
3. Western Governors urge Congress and the Administration to fund and implement a sustainable roads program. This program should include inventories, identification of roads still needed, upgrading roads to modern construction standards including fish passage, and decommissioning roads causing environmental damage or roads no longer needed. Western Governors recognize this is a multi-year effort focusing on priority watersheds and that overall progress is needed within a reasonable amount of time (15 years).
4. Western Governors urge the US Forest Service (USFS) to complete an accurate prioritized inventory of federal forest system roads that is sustainable in each state taking into account the needs for fish and wildlife habitat, outdoor recreation, timber and mining and fire suppression / mitigation.
5. Western Governors request the USFS provide to the Western Governors' Association (WGA) a funding strategy with financing alternatives outside the Federal Highway Trust Fund and resource needs assessment to put the roads system on a trajectory to be in compliance with federal and state clean water and species protection laws within 15 years.
6. Western Governors request the USFS report to WGA on an annual basis on progress toward a sustainable roads system including percent of roads in compliance, percent of fish blockages fixed, percent of roads decommissioned, number of miles of fish habitat newly accessed, and improvements in water quality.

C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE

1. The WGA shall post this Resolution to its web site to be referred to and transmitted as necessary.
2. The Resolution will specifically be distributed to federal and state agencies, administrators and members of the Congressional committees and subcommittees having authority to promote a transportation system on national forests lands that are compliant and sustainable while providing access to public lands.

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