



**January 28, 2015**

### **U.S. Forest Service Releases Final Snowmobile Rule**

The U.S. Forest Service on January 28, 2015 published a final rule that will regulate when and where over-snow vehicles (snowmobiles) can be used on national forest lands.

The final rule, which will take effect in about a month, will “provide a wide range of motorized and non-motorized recreational opportunities”, said U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. “This policy maintains community input and local decision-making so that those with knowledge of local areas can decide how to best balance natural resource issues with legitimate recreational uses of national forest land.”

The Travel Management Rule, established in 2005, adopted a system in which local forest managers designated trails, routes and areas in which off-highway vehicle use was allowed or prohibited. Because snowmobile tracks melt with the snow, whether to use this specific regulatory system to manage over-snow vehicles was at the discretion of the land manager. In March 2013 an Idaho federal judge ruled in favor of a lawsuit filed by the Winter Wildlands Alliance filed in November, 2011, requiring the Forest Service to conduct more analysis.

The American Council of Snowmobile Associations (ACSA) and the Idaho State Snowmobile Association, with substantial support from the International Snowmobile Manufacturers Association (ISMA), appealed the decision against the Forest Service. This appeal is currently ongoing. Blue Ribbon Coalition is also listed as a participant in the appeal.

The proposed rule was published on June 18, 2014 and the Forest Service received and analyzed thousands of comments that were received during the comment period. Along with ACSA, ISMA and the other participants in the appeal filed detailed public comments. Based on its findings, the Forest Service issued the final rule. The final rule will now require that each Forest Service unit and/or ranger district which has adequate snowfall to support OSV use, develop an OSV Plan that decides which routes, trails and areas should be open to snowmobiling, unless the unit already has such a Plan in place.

This Rule will provide consistency in how over-snow vehicle use is allowed by requiring the publication of maps designating trails, routes and areas where snowmobiles are allowed. Those forests that have already made decisions on OSV use, with public involvement, will not be required to go through that process again and current use may continue, unless the unit chooses to reopen its prior decision. Thus, a substantial number of Forests will not be required to go through this process again.

For those Forests that must conduct proceedings to designate trails, routes and areas as open or closed to snowmobile use, current use is protected on an interim basis while the unit conducts the proceeding. The Final Rule explains:

“Until designation for a unit or District are complete and an OSV use map indentifying those designations is published, existing OSV travel management policies, restrictions, and orders remain in effect. Use of NFS roads, NFS trails, and areas on NFS lands consistent with current OSV travel management decisions and management objectives may continue.”<sup>1</sup>

The Rule provides for the creation of over-snow vehicle use maps. It also modifies the definition for an “area” to encompass over-snow vehicle use over a broader landscape. The Forest Service explains that this recognizes that cross-country snowmobile use may be appropriate in areas in which cross-country use by wheeled off-highway vehicles would not be appropriate.

“Snowmobilers have participated in Forest Service planning for decades. Unfortunately it seems every time a Forest Service Plan is updated, snowmobilers lose trails and access,” said ACSA President Duane Sutton. “With this new rule, snowmobilers must maintain their diligence in attending these meetings and participating in the planning process. Our participation is more important now than ever.”

The American Council of Snowmobile Association is very appreciative of the input and financial support from individual snowmobilers, snowmobile clubs, state associations, and businesses throughout this process. ACSA looks forward to working with all of those individuals and groups in the implementation of this Rule.

To view the entire Final Rule, see <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2015-01-28/pdf/2015-01573.pdf>

If you have any questions, please contact the ACSA office.

American Council of Snowmobile Associations  
271 Woodland Pass, East Lansing, MI 48823  
517\*351\*4362 [www.snowmobilers.org](http://www.snowmobilers.org)



---

<sup>1</sup> Final Rule, 80 Fed. Reg. 4500, 4508 (January, 2015)

