

Alternative 1 (Modified Proposed Action)

Alternative 1 is a modified version of the proposed action provided to the public for comment during scoping. It differs from the original proposed action in that it: (1) adds 2 miles of open road in the vicinity of Bonita Canyon; (2) adds 2 miles of existing unauthorized road in the vicinity of Goose Creek, Pioneer Creek, and Mallette Canyon to provide motorized access to camping; (3) extends the elk calving seasonal closure date from June 15 to June 30 in the Midnight Meadows area; (4) adds 11 miles of existing closed road in the vicinity of Greenie Peak, Flag Mtn., the Red River Fish Hatchery, Lama, and Garrapata Canyon for the purposes of accessing firewood; and (5) removes 36 miles of existing 100-foot corridor. The increase in miles of road for firewood purposes addresses issue 8. The Forest Service proposes to make changes to its designated transportation system on the Questa RD of the Carson National Forest. The proposed action would:

Close 15 miles of road district wide. The roads are in the vicinity of Midnight Meadows, Mallette Canyon, Bitter Creek, Cerro Negro, Pioneer Creek, Deer Mesa, Pinabete, and Middle Fork, due to lack of access through private lands and/or resource concerns.

Add approximately 2 miles of existing roads in the vicinity of Cabresto Canyon (Elephant Rock) and Sawmill for the purposes of access to dispersed camping and other activities. These roads would be managed as maintenance level 2.

Add approximately 7 miles of existing roads in use but not part of the transportation system in the vicinity of Largo Canyon to provide route linkages and public access around private lands. These roads would be managed as maintenance level 2 (Largo Canyon, FR 493 to FR 132, FR 54D to FR 54F, FR 490, and FR 7).

Add a 150-foot corridor for motor vehicle use along 50 miles of designated roads in the vicinity of Cebolla Mesa, Lama, and Largo Canyon for the sole purpose of dispersed camping and downed big game retrieval. The corridor width addresses soil protection in low elevation pinyon-juniper vegetation.

Change approximately 36 miles of existing 100-foot corridor in the vicinity of Midnight Meadows, Pioneer Canyon, Placer Creek, Goose Creek and Taos Ski Valley to managed access for dispersed campsites.

Limit motorized access in riparian areas in the vicinity of Pioneer Canyon and Goose Creek by: (1) adding approximately 650 feet of existing unauthorized road segments for the purposes of access to dispersed camping and other activities, and (2) by having motorized vehicles park adjacent to designated roads and walk to access activities. The additional miles of road would be managed as maintenance level 2.

Add 2 miles of existing roads in use but not part of the transportation system roads (unauthorized) to be designated for motorcycle (single track) use only for route linkages in the Elephant Rock motorcycle loop.

Add approximately 1 mile of existing roads in use but not part of the transportation system (unauthorized) at the junction of Forest Roads 597 and 134 to access dispersed camping in Bonito Canyon. These roads would be managed as maintenance level 2.

Close 54B approximately 0.5 mile prior to the private land (Cabresto Park) boundary to take advantage of a location that provides for an adequate turnaround, parking, and signing area to reduce potential for trespass.

Change the vehicle class on approximately 2 miles of Fourth of July Canyon Road (Forest Road 490) from NM Highway 38 to the top of the ridge from “open to all motorized vehicles” to “open to motor vehicles 50 inches or less in width” until public safety and resource issues are resolved.

Add approximately 0.5 mile of existing road in use but not part of the transportation system at the junction of Forest Roads 597 and 49 (vicinity of the old golf course in Mallette Canyon) for the purposes of accessing dispersed camping. These roads would be managed as maintenance level 2.

Prohibit motor vehicle use from January 1 to April 30 on designated roads in the vicinity of Goose Creek, Pioneer Canyon, Foster Park and Forest Road 488 for soil and watershed protection.

Prohibit motor vehicle use from January 1 to August 15 on designated roads in the vicinity of Flag Mountain for wildlife habitat security.

Prohibit motor vehicle use from January 1 to April 30 on designated roads in the vicinity of Midnight Meadows for wildlife winter habitat security and from May 1 to June 30 for elk calving habitat protection.

Prohibit motor vehicle use from January 1 to April 30 on all designated roads in the vicinity of Cebolla Mesa with the exception of Forest Road 9 for wildlife habitat security and soil and water protection. Access to Cebolla Mesa Campground and trail would continue to be provided via Forest Road 9.

Continue to manage Middle Fork Lake Road as closed to motorized vehicles pending completion of district analysis of the cost of repair, special use permit status, non-motorized uses, and related subjects to the condition of the existing road surface.

Add approximately 11 miles of existing closed road in the vicinity of Greenie Peak, Flag Mountain, the Red River Fish Hatchery, Lama, and Garrapata Canyon for the purposes of accessing firewood for a period up to 5 years. These roads would be closed upon having additional designated firewood areas throughout the district. These roads would be managed as maintenance level 2, would only be open during the firewood gathering season and would not have corridors.

The proposed action would also amend the Carson Forest Plan to include the following management guidelines for the Questa RD:

All motor vehicle use is limited to designated open roads and motorized trails. Vehicles may park on the side of the designated road when it is safe to do so without causing damage to National Forest System resources or facilities, unless prohibited by State laws, traffic sign, or by order (36 CFR 261.13).

General cross-country travel by motor vehicles is prohibited, except when motor vehicle use is approved through written authorization issued under Federal law or regulation by the authorized officer.

Wildlife closure dates on the Questa Ranger District in the vicinity of Midnight Meadows and areas adjacent to the Valle Vidal Unit are January 1 to June 30 for calving and fawning. These dates are consistent with the Valle Vidal Unit wildlife closure dates.

Table 1. Proposed changes based on the modified proposed action to the designated transportation system for the Questa Ranger District

Miles of road designated for motor vehicle use. [(1) add less than 1 mile of open road in the vicinity of Bonita Canyon as a result of scoping comments; (2) add 2 miles of existing road not on the transportation system in the vicinity of Cabresto Canyon, Sawmill, Goose Creek, Pioneer Creek, and Mallette Canyon to provide access to camping; and (3) add 11 miles of existing not on the transportation system road in the vicinity of Greenie Peak, Flag Mtn., the Red River Fish Hatchery, Lama, and Garrapata Canyon for the purposes of accessing firewood.]	217	Close 15. Add 21 of which 11 miles are to be closed following firewood removal	223 of which 11 miles are to be closed following firewood removal leaving 212 miles
Miles of road with 300-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval.*	0	0	0
Miles of road with 150-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval. (Vicinity of Cebolla Mesa, Lama, and Largo Canyon for the sole purpose of dispersed camping and downed big game retrieval.)	0	Add 50	50
Miles of road with 100-foot corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval (2 miles in Goose Creek and Pioneer Canyon).	36	Remove 36	0
Miles of road with managed access to designated dispersed campsites (short spur roads to designated campsites).	0	Add 36	36
Miles of road with no corridor designated for motor vehicle use for the purpose of dispersed camping and big game retrieval. (Parking limited to adjacent to the road.)	181	Remove 44	137