

Idaho Roadless Rule and 2001 Roadless Rule

Northern and Intermountain Region Guidance

Topic - NEPA Analysis for Unroaded Lands Contiguous to Roadless Areas

Date – March 2019

Contact – Brian Riggers, Roadless Coordinator

Purpose

This paper shows you how to identify and map unroaded lands contiguous to IRAs as part of one, inclusive Roadless Expanse. A NEPA effects analysis can then be completed for the entire area, resulting in a more efficient and focused analysis (add hotlink to “how to do a roadless analysis” here).

Introduction

Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and their specific boundaries are defined in a series of maps maintained by the Washington Office of the Forest Service at the EDW (add hotlink to IRR and RACR maps). These boundaries cannot be changed through project planning or Forest Plan revision. Sometimes, unroaded lands occur adjacent to an IRA, but they are not included within the IRA boundary. In these cases, NEPA and court rulings require that we analyze the effects of proposed activities on the values and characteristics of these unroaded lands and their contributions to IRAs as well. This process can help in project planning by increasing our understanding of potential effects to roadless characteristics early in project development, allowing us to make better informed decisions. Analyzing effects to unroaded lands contiguous to IRAs does not add acres to IRAs or change the IRA boundary in any way.

What is a roadless expanse?

A roadless expanse is *both the Inventoried Roadless Area and the unroaded lands contiguous to the roadless area* (See Step 1 below to determine these).


Why do we analyze potential effects to a roadless expanse?

Based on court history^{1, 2}, projects on unroaded lands contiguous to Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) it is recommended units analyze the environmental consequences, including irreversible and irretrievable commitment of resources on Roadless Area Characteristics, and the effects for potential designation as wilderness under the Wilderness Act of 1964. This analysis considers the effects to the entire roadless expanse.

¹ <https://casetext.com/case/smith-v-us-forest-service>

² <http://caselaw.findlaw.com/us-9th-circuit/1350570.html>





IRAs should not be considered in isolation from contiguous unroaded lands. Actions occurring in one or the other (unroaded or inventoried roadless lands) may affect the surrounding areas ability to support roadless area characteristics.

Contiguous unroaded lands are not subject to the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) or Idaho Roadless Rule (IRR) – they are managed according to Forest Plan management area standards and guidelines. However, the nine roadless area characteristics found within a contiguous unroaded area should be analyzed for potential effects because, similar to IRAs, these areas may also contain important attributes associated with Inventoried Roadless Areas. Including an analysis of unroaded lands within the NEPA document ensures a “hard look” is completed. These areas may also be important because of their potential for future designation as wilderness.

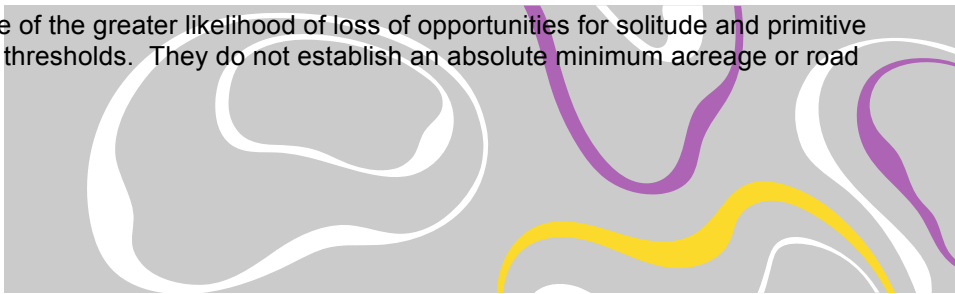
How do we analyze potential effects to a roadless expanse?


The first step is to identify whether or not there are unroaded lands contiguous to an IRA to be considered as part of the roadless expanse. Once this is done, the analysis of the potential effects to the roadless expanse is the same as the analysis of potential effects to the IRA, completed as one area, considering the nine roadless area characteristics.

To determine if unroaded lands contiguous to an IRA will be analyzed as part of the Roadless Expanse, complete the following (see Insert for an example of what this might look like):

1. In GIS, identify unroaded polygons adjacent to existing IRAs. An initial screen can often be developed by considering unroaded adjacent polygons of at least 100 acres between roads that are at least ½ mile span.³ (note: areas that contain decommissioned roads and level 1 roads should be included, as should areas with past harvest that has largely recovered and is not “substantially noticeable”).
2. Determine whether these unroaded lands contribute to the nine roadless area characteristics of the IRA, or if they function more similarly to adjacent managed lands outside of the IRA.
3. Consider the size, shape, and geographic context of the unroaded lands. While there is no minimum size for inclusion in the roadless expanse, small areas will generally be less likely than large areas to contribute substantially to roadless area characteristics of the IRA. Similarly, areas that are separated from an IRA by geographic or physical features other than roads (such as ridges, streams, structures, etc.) may be less likely to contribute to roadless area characteristics.
4. Respond to public comment that requests specific adjacent unroaded areas be considered in the analysis. Also consider whether there are areas with roadless area characteristics that aren’t accounted for in the initial GIS screen.
5. For each unroaded area adjacent to an IRA, document why the area will either be considered as part of the roadless expanse or not based on the above factors.
6. Develop a map that clearly identifies 1) the IRA, 2) unroaded areas adjacent to the IRA that were considered but not included in the analysis of potential effects to roadless resources, 3) unroaded areas adjacent to the IRA that are included in the analysis of potential effects to the roadless resource, and 4) the roadless expanse (the roadless expanse includes any unroaded

³ These sizes are suggested because of the greater likelihood of loss of opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation opportunities below these thresholds. They do not establish an absolute minimum acreage or road span for consideration.





contiguous lands that were identified as necessary for consideration in steps 1-4 above plus the IRA).

Following is an example of what identification of the Roadless Expanse for a project might look like (note that this is more complex than most analyses to illustrate different potential situations – for most projects this step will be one or two short paragraphs and a map):

Project XX Roadless Expanse:

The ABC Inventoried Roadless Area includes 17,200 acres in Big and Little watersheds. There are four areas that contain unroaded lands adjacent to the IRA (see map).

Area A is approximately 850 acres and includes three miles of road that was decommissioned in 2008. It also includes 200 acres of past timber harvest that was completed in the mid-1980's and is not substantially noticeable at this point. Neither of these past activities preclude Area A from being considered as part of the Roadless Expanse. Approximately 500 acres of Area A (A1) lies within the same basin as the IRA – the remaining 350 acres (A2) is on the other side of the ridge. Watershed, wildlife, and other ecosystem processes of the 350 acres function more similarly to the developed watershed they are within than the 500 acres within the same basin as the IRA. There are no unique features that contribute substantially to the roadless area characteristics of the ABC IRA within the 350 acres in the adjoining basin, however, the 500 acres of unroaded lands in the same basin as the IRA do contribute to roadless area characteristics of the IRA. Therefore, the 500 acres (A1) will be considered as part of the Roadless Expanse and the 350 acres on the other side of the ridge (A2) will not (see map).

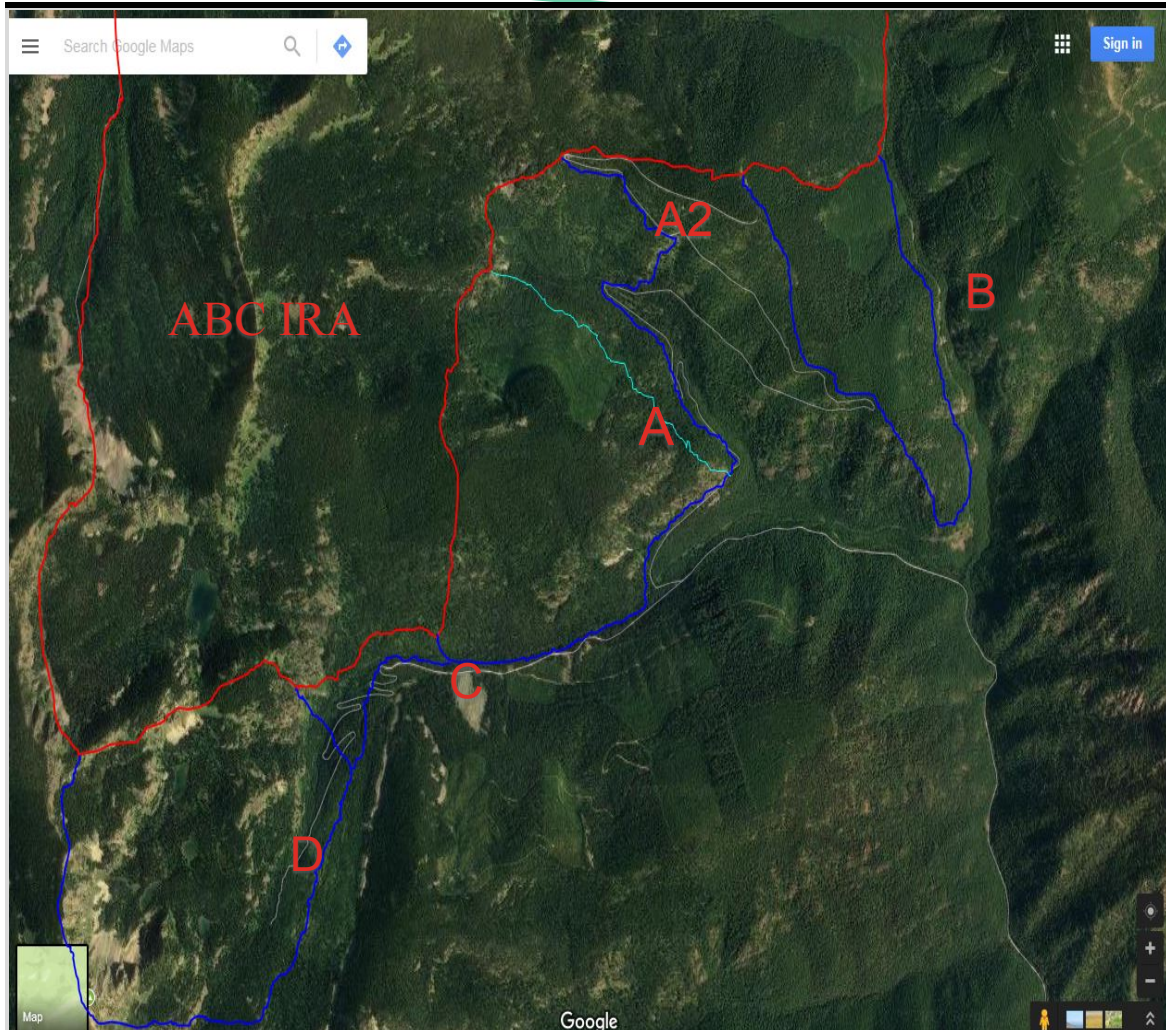
Area B is approximately 300 acres. While there are no roads within Area B, most of it is within ½ mile of a road on either side. Area B is mostly homogenous north facing hillside between the ridge and valley bottom. It contains no unique features that contribute substantially to the ABC IRA and it will not be considered as part of the Roadless Expanse (see map).

Area C includes 190 acres in a narrow band between the existing road and the IRA boundary (the white line is a trail that continues from the end of the road). This is likely a mapping error of the original roadless inventory mapping process. Area C functions similarly to the ABC IRA and it will be included in the Roadless Expanse (see map).

Area D includes approximately 400 acres in the head end of a small tributary to Little Creek. Some of Area D was harvested from the existing road in the mid-1980's and contains numerous springs and wet areas that are heavily used by wildlife. This area was specifically mentioned in public comments. Because it provides high quality habitat and supports similar and connected ecosystem processes as ABC IRA it will be considered as part of the Roadless Expanse (see map).

In total, there are approximately 1090 acres (A1, C, and D) of unroaded lands adjacent to the ABC IRA that function similarly and contribute to the roadless area characteristics of the IRA. These acres, combined with the 17,200 acres within the ABC IRA make up the Roadless Expanse for the XYZ project and will serve as the basis for analysis of potential effects to the roadless resource (see map).





The analysis of potential effects for Inventoried Roadless Areas (including unroaded areas adjacent to IRAs as identified above) includes the entire Roadless Expanse. For assistance in completing this analysis, click the following link: (add “ANALYSIS OF EFFECTS FOR PROJECTS IN INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS” hotlink here).

Conclusion

Project IRA analyses should include a clear description and map of unroaded lands contiguous to IRAs that contribute to roadless characteristics. The combined area should be termed the “roadless expanse”, and roadless effects analyses should consider effects to the entire roadless expanse as one area. Following the above steps will provide a clear and consistent method for addressing this NEPA topic.





Roadless Expanse Frequently Asked Questions

- 1) Q. Won't identifying the contiguous unroaded lands mean that we need to consider it for potential wilderness or manage it differently?
 - A. No. Lands that are not included in IRAs are managed under the Forest Plan. They could be considered for wilderness recommendation during the Forest Plan revision process (wilderness inventory and evaluation).
 - 2) Q. If the public identifies contiguous unroaded lands in scoping, do we need to include this in the roadless expanse?
 - A. Yes, if these lands meet the criteria identified in Step 1. Whether contiguous unroaded lands are part of the roadless expanse is determined through this process. All contiguous unroaded lands should be evaluated – if they meet the criteria they should be considered as part of the roadless expanse.
 - 3) Q. Can we propose timber harvest or road construction on these unroaded lands?
 - A. Yes, if the Forest Plan management area guidance allows it. Your analysis will disclose the effects to roadless characteristics associated with these activities (hotlink to roadless characteristics worksheet - -maybe footnote these and provide hotlink there).
 - 4) Q. Do user-created roads count as roads that may exclude an area from a roadless expanse?
 - A. No. User-created routes are unauthorized and not included in the Forest Service transportation system. Their presence doesn't preclude an area from consideration as part of a roadless expanse.
 - 5) Q. What about a road strictly to private property, or a road only for administrative (agency) use?
 - A. These would be considered roads and would exclude that portion of the area from being considered part of a roadless expanse.
 - 6) Q. Do decommissioned and level 1 roads count?
 - A. No. Roads that have been previously decommissioned and level 1 roads would not preclude an area from being considered part of a roadless expanse. The presence of Level 2 roads and higher may preclude consideration.
 - 7) Q. Does past timber harvest preclude an area from being considered?
 - A. Past timber harvest that is "substantially noticeable" (e.g., clearcuts and other regeneration prescriptions that haven't recovered) may warrant excluding an area from the roadless expanse if the area no longer contributes substantially to roadless area characteristics of the IRA. This site specific determination should be well documented in the specialist report.
- 