



USDA Forest Service Update

August 2011

Subject: NFMA Proposed Planning Rule Process

Issue: The Forest Service needs a new planning rule that can more effectively address the current and future needs of the National Forest System and reflect the latest science and knowledge about effective land management. The FS doesn't want to continue to rely on procedures that have been in place since 1982 to sustain and restore the health and resilience of our National Forests. Individual forests and grasslands follow the direction of the planning rule to develop, revise or amend land management plans specific to their unit. Plans created under this proposed new rule will help the Agency move forward with land management projects that will increase the health of our forests and grasslands, improve public safety and yield jobs.

Key Points of the Proposed New Rule:

Will provide a collaborative and science-based framework for planning in order to sustain and restore our National Forests.

- Will provide guidance for land management to restore ecosystems and watersheds, protect wildlife, respond to a changing climate, and connect people to NFS lands.
- Emphasizes protecting and enhancing water resources and providing functioning habitat.
- Will provide for diversity of plant and animal communities. The goal is to keep common native species common, contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and protect species of conservation concern.
- National Forest System lands will be managed in the context of the broader landscape to better protect our lands and waters.

Will promote vibrant communities by supporting sustainable recreation and rural job opportunities in the National Forest System.

- Will consider the full suite of multiple uses of the plan area, including outdoor recreation, watershed, wildlife and fish, wilderness, grazing, timber, energy, minerals, ecosystem services, and other relevant resources, uses and values.
- Will provide for sustainable recreation opportunities and access, which will contribute to the social and economic health of communities.

Will recognize the importance of working with state and other government agencies in managing habitat for sustainable fish and game populations. During the plan development or revision process, the responsible official will review:

- Planning and land use policies of federally recognized Indian Tribes and of other federal, State, and local governments;
- Assessments conducted by other federal agencies, statewide forest resource assessments, community wildfire protection plans, or state wildlife action plans;
- Objectives of federally recognized Indian Tribes, and of other federal, State, and local governments, as expressed in their plans and policies;
- Compatibility and interrelated impacts of these plans and policies;
- Opportunities to resolve or reduce conflicts, within the context of achieving the Forest Service desired conditions or objectives;
- Where appropriate, opportunities to encourage federally recognized Tribes, States, counties, and other local governments to seek cooperating agency status.

Will require reaching out to partners to look for opportunities to meet joint objectives and build efficiencies in planning, implementation and monitoring. Responsible officials will consider:

- State lists of endangered, threatened, rare, endemic, or other classifications of species, such as those listed as threatened under State law; and other sources to inform the selection of species of conservation concern.
- Habitat conditions for wildlife, fish, and plants commonly enjoyed and used by the public, such as species that are hunted, fished, trapped, gathered, observed, or needed for subsistence and understanding that certain species play a special role in social, cultural, and economic sustainability.
- Effectiveness and efficiency of agency monitoring so that the money spent on monitoring results in information that can better inform management decisions, including: capitalizing on existing national and regional inventory, monitoring, and research programs of the National Forest System, State and Private Forestry, Research and Development, and of other governmental and non-governmental parties; and when designing monitoring plans, to design and carry out multi-party monitoring with other Forest Service units, Federal, State or local government agencies, scientists, partners, and members of the public.

The new rule includes a strong emphasis on protecting and enhancing water resources.

- The effects of forest health and management practices on water resources will be analyzed at the land management planning and project levels through the NEPA process.
- The rule will require that plans include components to maintain, protect, and restore public water supplies, groundwater, sole source aquifers, and source water areas where they occur on NFS lands.

Background:

- The Forest Service received around 300,000 comments on the proposed rule and the draft environmental impact statement during the 90-day comment period. This incredible response is due in part to our efforts to help the public understand and comment on the proposed rule during the comment period. Public participation will help the Agency develop a final rule that will have broad support and will endure over time.
- The Forest Service is working to review, analyze and respond to the comments received. Comments will help improve the proposed rule and develop a final rule that is stakeholder-driven and science-based; and is expected to be published in late 2011.
- The collaborative process guiding the development of this rule will not end with the publication of the final rule. The FS intends to retain a collaborative approach as we implement the rule, which is necessary for implementation of this rule to be successful.
- The rule will require working across boundaries and evaluating issues at the landscape scale in all phases of the planning process: assessment, revision or amendment, and monitoring. The rule acknowledges the benefits of working with other National Forest System units and with other Federal, State, and local governments to share information and identify opportunities to meet joint goals.

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