

**USDA Forest Service Update**  
**March 2010**



**SUBJECT: NFMA Planning Rule Development**

On behalf of the US Forest Service, we would like to invite you to participate in the collaborative process for the development of a new National Forest planning rule. In a speech on August 14, 2009, USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack called for a new rule to guide the development of National Forest plans. He specifically charged the Forest Service with creating the new rule using a collaborative process. On December 18, 2009 the Forest Service issued a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement for a new planning rule, outlining the collaborative process and suggesting a set of principles and questions that might be used to help develop the planning rule. The collaborative process provides numerous avenues for contributing meaningful input for the agency's decision making process and allows diverse interests to come together to explore critical issues. The input will be used by the USDA Forest Service rule writing team in the development of the draft environmental impact statement and proposed rule.

The process includes a Science Forum, National and Regional Roundtables, Tribal collaboration and consultation, and an electronic discussion forum at the [Planning Rule Blog](#) to engage, educate, encourage meaningful dialogue, and gain as much input as possible from interested stakeholders. The Science Forum and all roundtables will be open, public forums. Notes from the various roundtables will be synthesized and posted for further feedback opportunities. The national roundtables will include a webcast component with links to the planning rule blog to allow for participation by those unable to attend the events in person; webcasting may also be available for some of the regional roundtables. The NOI and additional information about all the different ways to participate is available at the [Forest Service Planning Rule Website](#). Pre-registration at the in-person events is strongly requested as far in advance as possible – preferably one week prior to any meeting(s) you plan to attend.

**SCIENCE FORUM:** March 29 – 30, 2010 in Washington DC is being convened by the USDA Forest Service with support from Booz Allen Hamilton. Panels of scientists will present the latest science on topics relevant to the development of the planning rule. The key themes from the science forum will help frame the collaborative discussions at the regional and national roundtables that will follow. Please pre-register here: [www.fsnationalmeetings.eventbrite.com](http://www.fsnationalmeetings.eventbrite.com). If you have questions concerning special needs or to request sign language interpretation, contact Kathryn Hite at 703-412-7494 or by email at [hite\\_kathryn@bah.com](mailto:hite_kathryn@bah.com) by March 22, 2010.

Three **NATIONAL ROUNDTABLES** are being convened by the Forest Service with support from the US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (USIECR) and the Meridian Institute. Your attendance at all three meetings is encouraged! Please pre-register here: [www.fsnationalmeetings.eventbrite.com](http://www.fsnationalmeetings.eventbrite.com). If you have questions concerning special needs or to request sign language interpretation, contact Danielle Youngblood at (202) 354-6451 or [dyoungblood@merid.org](mailto:dyoungblood@merid.org) at least a week before the scheduled roundtable.

**First National Roundtable** - April 1-2, 2010 at the Omni Shoreham Hotel in Washington DC. This meeting will engage attendees in dialogue about the planning rule and will solicit focused input on how the planning rule should address restoration, climate change, watershed health and biodiversity (NOI substance principles 1-4).

**Second National Roundtable** - April 20-21, 2010 in Washington DC (specific location TBD). This meeting will engage attendees in dialogue about the planning rule and to solicit focused input on how the planning rule should address the social, economic and cultural contribution of NFS lands to surrounding communities; provide for effective collaboration; consider the relationship between national forests and surrounding lands; and use the latest in planning science (NOI substance principle 5 and process principles 1-3).

**Third National Roundtable** - May 11-12, 2010 in Washington DC (specific location TBD). This meeting will allow stakeholders to discuss and build upon the synthesized results from the Science Forum and the preceding national and regional roundtables.

To encourage broad participation the Forest Service, through the National Forest Foundation, is offering the opportunity to apply for travel support (flight and/or ground transportation and/or hotel) to attend the national roundtables. These funds are targeted toward individuals who would not be able to attend without such assistance. This assistance will help ensure that multiple stakeholder perspectives are represented in the planning rule dialogue. Additional information and an application are available at <http://www.nationalforests.org/conservation/learning/planning-rule-travel-assistance>.

**REGIONAL ROUNDTABLES** are being conducted throughout April in locations around the country. The roundtables will engage stakeholders in dialogue about the planning rule, and provide opportunities for stakeholders to explore issues of particular relevance in each Forest Service region. Dates, locations, and registration links are available at the [Forest Service Planning Rule Website](#).

Secretary Vilsack's charge to the Forest Service gives all stakeholders a unique opportunity to play a vital role in the development of a new National Forest Service planning rule that draws on the best elements of previous rulemaking efforts, while considering new scientific knowledge as well as the evolving values and priorities for forest and ecosystem management. Please join in this exciting endeavor. Thank you!

The Meridian Institute Team  
[www.merid.org](http://www.merid.org)

