



Revision Reporter

Custer National Forest - Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest - Nebraska National Forest

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Here's What

We Heard

Highlights of public scoping comments

We really appreciate the time and effort members of the public have taken to provide input and their ideas.

The Forest Service has a better understanding of public issues. The major revision topics appear to be in line with what people have on their minds.

From meeting notes to form letters, about 3,150 comment documents were received and recorded. Following are some highlights of the public comments organized around the major revision topics and around other topics in alphabetical order by topic.

Community and Lifestyle Relationships -

Many commentators stated that livestock ranching is an important part of their lifestyle and has been, in some cases, for several generations in their families. Some people stressed the economic contribution of livestock grazing to local communities and governments. Continued livestock grazing was not only important to their livelihood but also to their local area. The Forest Service was encouraged to make management decisions that would lead to a stable and diverse economic base.

The importance of one management approach or emphasis over another was discussed in some comments. Some commentators asked that natural resource protection and nonconsumptive uses be given stronger consideration in Forest Service management.

Livestock Grazing - Many comments favored a continued program of livestock grazing, and some people stated that livestock grazing should be a dominant use; some referred to the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act as the foundation for their position. Other comments were concerned about grazing levels that compromise other resource values, such as wildlife habitat and recre-

ation settings. Comments urged either increases or decreases in livestock grazing levels. Many respondents debated the benefits or drawbacks of livestock grazing on rangeland health.

Oil, Gas, Minerals - Many comments regarding oil, gas, and minerals development wanted more protective measures in environmentally sensitive areas and suggested that roadless and recreation areas, and important wildlife habitats not be leased.

Plant and Animal Control- While many commentors agreed that noxious weeds are a problem, the suggestions for specific species and treatments varied. There was some concern about indiscriminate and widespread use of pesticides and herbicides. Comments on prairie dogs either encouraged the Forest Service to control prairie dogs or to stop killing them. Some commentors didn't support predator control and even suggested restoring some native predators. Other commentors encouraged predator control and offered ideas on methods to control predators.

Rangeland and Forest Health - Numerous comments encouraged protection and restoration of native biological communities, and preservation of habitats for threatened, endangered, sensitive, and rare species.

Other commentors stated that the government overreacts to species concerns, leading to restrictions on grazing, energy development, and recreation activities.

Many respondents asked that bison be returned to the Northern Great Plains because they are considered a positive natural biological contributor suited to the prairie

ecosystem.

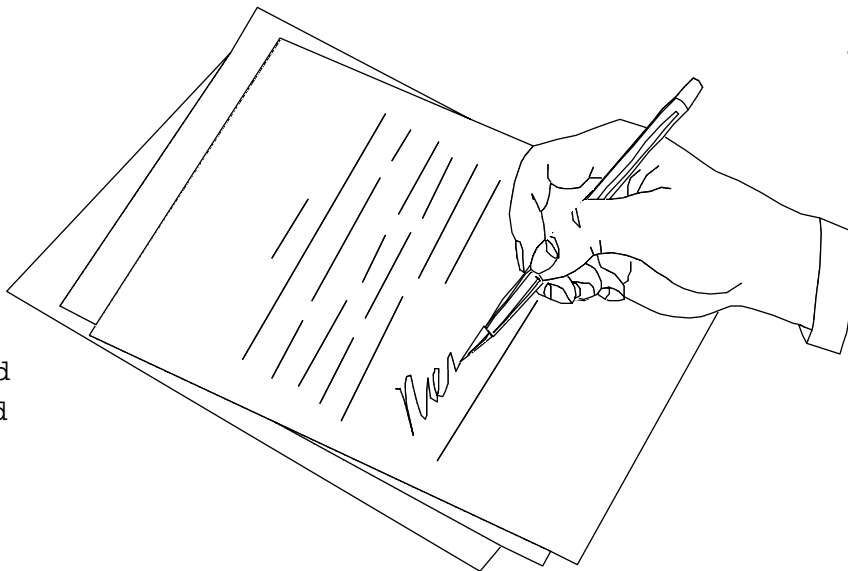
Many commentors interested in bison also requested that prairie dog colonies be restored. There were many questions about how management indicator species are selected and used. There were also general comments about wildlife and game species.

Some commentors requested that native plant species and communities be restored and protected. Many stated concern over the influence of nonnative plant species.

Many comments supported the use of controlled or prescribed fire as a way to improve vegetation conditions. While some people opposed any timber harvest, others thought some timber harvest is needed on Nebraska's Pine Ridge and Wyoming's Thunder Basin National Grassland.

Many commentors supported maintaining the tree plantations in Nebraska's Sandhills. However, a few

commentors thought the artificial forest should be allowed to return to native prairie.



Recreation, Travel Management and Visuals

- An appreciation for the recreation opportunities offered on the national grasslands and forests was evident in many comments. Some commentors requested more recreation invest-

ments in campgrounds, picnic sites, trails, etc. Other people value the primitive nature of the public lands and discouraged additional recreation developments. Many people are concerned about growing conflicts associated with increasing public recreation use.

Off-road travel concerns were on the minds of many commentors. Many people asked for more control and enforcement of restrictions. Off-highway vehicle enthusiasts emphasized that the national grasslands and forests are among the few, if not the only, places for them to

ride. They offered to work with the Forest Service to address off-road travel issues. Some commentors requested a system of non-motorized trails, fewer fences, and more gates through fences.

Hunting comments concerned wildlife habitat requirements; some discussed access for hunters; some addressed hunter trespass on private land. Some people want walk-in hunting areas to improve their hunting experiences. There were comments that either endorsed or opposed prairie dog recreational shooting. Interest was also expressed in creating or renovating ponds and improving stream and river segments to enhance sport fishing.

Special Designations- Many comments requested that roadless areas be recommended to Congress for Wilderness or that roadless areas be protected in some fashion to maintain their undeveloped character. A few commentors wanted no additional Wilderness or wanted motorized access maintained or expanded.

Comments both supported or opposed Research Natural Areas and Special Interest Areas. People also had questions about management direction for these areas and how particular activities could be affected.

While there was some support for Wild and Scenic River designations in principle, most commentors who addressed this topic opposed designations for the Little

Missouri River in North Dakota and the Middle Loup River in Nebraska. There were also questions about the effects and implications of federal designation on private property.

OTHER TOPICS

Fossils - Many views were expressed on fossils. Some people supported only scientific collection; some stated that amateurs should be permitted to collect; others thought commercial collecting should be allowed.

Heritage Resources, Treaty Rights, Tribal Relations- Commentors encouraged the preservation and interpretation of cultural and historical sites. Comments on treaty rights discussed water rights and access to the national grasslands. Commentors also encouraged American Indian Tribal involvement in Forest Service management.

Land Use - People favored land exchanges because they can consolidate small, isolated public tracts, improving hunting opportunities, prairie dog management, and overall management efficiency.

Water Resources - Commentors were concerned about the quality of water for a variety of uses. Some people discussed the sources of pollution and requested that these issues be dealt with in management direction. Respondents also requested that riparian areas and wetlands be protected and they offered their ideas.

What Is the Intent of Public Scoping?

The process to revise the management plans must follow the requirements outlined in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

A first NEPA requirement is to define the scope of the analysis. One definition for scope is the "extent of treatment, activity, or influence."

Defining the scope early helps avoid the traps of gathering irrelevant information and conducting needless analysis. In the same light, relevant information needs to be identified so it can be considered in the analysis and resulting decisions.

SCOPING defines:

- values people have for resources,
- issues and concerns,
- potential management approaches,
- effects people want to see addressed.

Some public comments discussed topics that are outside the scope of decisions that can be made for the management plans. For instance, some commentors proposed fees to access the public lands or proposed increases in grazing fees. These fees are not determined by the Forest Service; they require Congressional action. The sale of the national grasslands and forests, promoted by some commentors, would also require Congressional action.

Group Interviews Held to Further Management Understanding

In the fall of 1997, the US Forest Service conducted interviews with 19 groups of people who identified with a use or interest in the national grasslands and forests in the Northern Great Plains. These group discussions were led by trained moderators who asked a set of standard questions provided by the Forest Service.

The questions were designed to explore principal management goals for the public lands; opportunities for and obstacles to achieving those goals; and methods to

resolve conflicts between uses or interests.

The group discussions allowed for a deeper investigation into people's values, views, and experiences. The results will help managers understand the values people have for different management approaches. The results presented here are some common perceptions shared by many of the group participants. Copies of the final focus group summary reports are available at ranger district and forest supervisor offices.

Healthy grasslands and forests are important. A healthy natural environment is a prominent management goal. Many described this condition as vigorously growing native grass and producing timber stands that can withstand insects, disease, and fire. Viable wildlife populations, properly functioning grassland ecosystems, and a healthy mosaic of native vegetation that includes provisions for threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant and animal species were also used to describe desired conditions.

Lengthy decision processes and a loss of common-sense management are causing frustration. People in the industry segments expressed frustration over a loss of “common-sense” management. They maintain that politics and the many laws and requirements are often obstacles to getting things done. A perceived lack of experienced Forest Service workers familiar with grassland resources and laws further adds to the frustrations. Local managers are perceived to have lost their authority, and it seems to many that local knowledge, experience and opinions are not respected or used.

Access to public lands is a growing concern. Access to public lands is highly valued because of the limited amount of public lands in the region and the increasing amount of private land closed to the public. Some people complain there is no access to isolated public tracts and it is difficult to get into some fenced pastures. Adjacent land owners often resent the public trespass that occurs on their private land.

Off-road travel is a frequent worry. People suggest that cross-country motorized travel can cause erosion and reduce the recreation experiences of others. While recreational motorized use is accepted by most as a multiple-use activity, people believe it should not harm the land or lessen the experiences of others.

Multiple use and stewardship are familiar terms and accepted concepts. Most people see multiple use as fundamental to Forest Service management. However, some uses and interests believe they are cut short in the multiple-use pie. Most people value the concept of land stewardship and many describe themselves as good stewards.

Livestock grazing is an accepted practice. While most people agree that grazing can benefit grassland health, ideas differ on the intensity and methods. Many believe that grazing should not occur to the detriment of natural resources.

Conflicts are not easily resolved. People are perplexed about how to resolve conflicts over Forest Service land management. Some people suggest that education and information might fill some gaps between views. Methods that bring people together to discuss problems and explore options have wide support.

Get to know your

NATIONAL GRASSLANDS



The Custer National Forest will be holding information fairs featuring national grassland resources and programs. Stations will display inventory information gathered for the management plan revision topics. Information will be available on the following inventories:

- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Special Interest Areas and Research Natural Areas
- Roadless Areas
- Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive Species
- Economics and Demographics
- Range Conditions
- Noxious Weeds

Did you know?

There is a Visitors' Center dedicated to national grasslands' education and information? It is located in Wall, SD. The center is open seven days a week.

Mark your calendar

Lemmon, SD - April 29, 3-8 pm, Dakota Bank

Dickinson, ND - April 30, 1-6 pm, Hospitality Inn

Watford City, ND - May 1, 1-5 pm, City Hall

Bismarck, ND - May 5, 1-6 pm, Seven Seas, I-94 and Exit 152, Mandan

Fargo, ND - May 6, 1-6, Holiday Inn, 3803 13th Avenue

Lisbon, ND - May 7, 3-8 pm, Super 8 Motel

Preliminary Inventory Results Available

The preliminary results of the many studies and inventories to support Northern Great Plains planning are available. These studies and inventories describe the current resource conditions. The effects of the management alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement will be described as predicted changes to the current conditions. Many of these studies, inventories and associated maps are available at the ranger district and forest supervisor offices.



Next stop on the ROAD TO REVI- SION

The Forest Service is reviewing the scoping comments and considering them as they formulate management alternatives. The alternatives will be analyzed in detail, and the effects and trade-offs between the different management approaches will be displayed in a draft environmental impact statement (EIS). The draft EIS and proposed revised management plans are scheduled for release in September 1998. At that time, the public will be invited to review the draft EIS and revised management plans and offer their comments.