RECORD OF DECISION
for
USDA FOREST SERVICE

Final Environmental Impact Statement
Pike and San Isabel National Forests
and
Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands
Land and Resource Management Plan

Alamosa, Baca, Chaffee, Clear Creek, Custer, Douglas, El Paso, Fremont, Huerfano, Jefferson, Lake, Las Animas, Otero, Park, Pueblo, Saguache, and Teller Counties, Colorado; Morton and Stevens Counties, Kansas.

RECORD OF DECISION
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I. INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents the approval of the Land and Resource Management Plan (the Plan) for the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and the Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands (collectively known as the Forest). The Plan is a long-range program for all natural resource management activities and establishes management requirements to be employed in implementing it. The Plan identifies the resource management practices, the projected levels of production of goods and services and the location where various types of resource management activities are planned and are expected to occur.

The Plan provides for coordinated multiple-use management of outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife, fish, and wilderness resources resulting in yields of goods and services for the benefit of the American people. The Plan also provides broad direction for dealing with applications and permits for occupancy and use of National Forest System (NFS) lands by the public and for management of the impacts from mineral and fossil fuel exploration and development activities on the Forest.

The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Plan were developed under the regulations found in Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 219 which were published in 47 FR 43026 on September 30, 1982.

The Plan establishes long-term management direction. Short-term opportunities, problems or conflicts may arise in managing the Forest that were not anticipated in the Plan. The Plan can be adjusted through rescheduling, amending, or revising in accordance with the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures.

The Final EIS describes a proposed action (the Plan) and alternatives to the proposed action. The FEIS also describes the environment to be affected and discloses the potential environmental consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives to it.

Preparing an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required by NEPA, Council on Environmental Quality Regulations, Title 40, Code of Federal Regulations, Parts 1500-1508 (40 CFR 1500-1508); and the implementing regulations of NFMA, (36 CFR 219). Plan development and preparation was also guided by many other laws and regulations which are summarized in the preface to the Plan.

Major features of the Plan are:

- The Plan identifies the desired condition of the Forest to be achieved sometime in the future. This is presented in the Goals section of Chapter III of the Plan, pages III-3 through III-6. Goals are timeless in that they have no specific date by which they are to be achieved. The Goal statements form the basis for developing objectives (36 CFR 219.3). Plan objectives are concise, time-specific, measurable results that are responsive to the goals of the Plan.

- The Plan identifies management objectives for the Forest to achieve the goals. It also describes how resources are to be managed in order to attain these objectives. The objectives are presented in Chapter III of the Plan, pages III-6 through III-9. These objectives are displayed as levels of goods and services that are planned to be achieved. The objectives were derived through a systematic interdisciplinary process used to develop alternatives described in Chapter II of the FEIS. There is no assurance, however, that all the objectives will be achieved. Achievement of these objectives can be influenced by many factors, such as budget levels, changes in laws and regulations, national and local economic factors, and the dynamic natural and physical factors at work in the Forest.

- The Plan specifies management requirements which control and govern how activities will be implemented on the Forest. These begin on page III-11 of the Plan. The Plan includes Forest Direction and Management Area Prescriptions. Forest Direction details overall management requirements that apply to the entire Forest. Forest Direction is applied in addition to the management requirements for each Management Area Prescription. The Plan assigns Management Area Prescriptions to specific land areas within the Forest. Forest Direction and Management Area Prescriptions are displayed in Chapter III of the Plan. The Plan map displays locations where the Management Area Prescriptions apply.

- Mitigation measures to avoid or minimize environmental harm are incorporated as part of the management requirements in the Forest Direction and Management Area Prescriptions in Chapter III of the Plan. Mitigation is also discussed in Chapter IV of the Final EIS.

- The Plan contains monitoring and evaluation requirements to determine how well objectives, standards, and guidelines have been applied. The monitoring procedure is displayed in Chapter IV of the Plan. An annual monitoring action plan will be prepared as part of the total Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands annual program of work. The annual monitoring plan will include the details of the amount and location of monitoring to be accomplished based on the approved program of work and funds available for monitoring.

- The Plan includes proposed schedules for implementing Forest Service activities. These schédules are in Plan Appendices A, C, and D. The Forest Supervisor has authority (36 CFR 219.10(e)) to change the proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated funds.

- The Plan reflects my recommendations on suitability or unsuitability of the Sangre de Cristo, Spanish Peaks, Greenhorn Mountain and Buffalo Peaks Wilderness Study Areas, for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The recommendation for the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area includes that portion within the Rio Grande National Forest (130,700 acres), and four U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, Wilderness Study Areas (Black Canyon, South Piney Creek, Papa Keal and Zapata Creek) that total 4,910 acres. These lands are contiguous to the western boundary of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area and have been included with the Forest Service study and recommendation.

- The Plan reflects my decision on suitability or unsuitability of the Lost Creek Further Planning Area for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System or for other uses.

II. ISSUES AND CONCERNS

In the initial phase of the planning process, public issues and management concerns were identified through a review of past public involvement efforts. Local, regional and national issues were identified. Federal, State and local agencies and governments as well as the general public were asked to validate existing issues and define any new ones. This information was then used to establish the scope of the EIS (40 CFR 1501.7 and 1508.25).

Public issues and management concerns were grouped according to similarity of emphasis and content. From these groupings, 15 Planning Questions were developed to respond to each of the major public issues and management concerns that would be "answered" by the Plan. Planning Questions address the appropriate role of the Forest in:

Managing the range (grazing) resource; supplying timber products; responding to increasing demands for water; managing wilderness; recommending additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System and Wild and Scenic Rivers System; maintaining and improving wildlife and fish habitats; and managing riparian areas; providing access to National Forest System Lands for minerals activities (and minimizing adverse impacts of these activities); improving resource management programs through land exchanges, right-of-way acquisitions and property line location; integrating utility corridor needs; managing insects and diseases that threaten the Forest; carrying out fire protection and appropriate fire suppression methods appropriate within wilderness; providing developed and dispersed recreation opportunities; managing cultural resources; providing roads and trails for access and transportation; and participating in human and community development programs in cooperation with private industry and State and local governments.

Public comment following release of the proposed Plan and DEIS did not surface any new issues. The planning questions clarified were: 1) wilderness preservation; 2) oil and gas leasing in wilderness; 3) timber harvest levels; 4) developing new skiing areas; 5) road closures; and 6) economic concerns over reduced Forest Service budgets.

Detailed discussions of Planning Questions can be found beginning on page S-9 in the Summary and on Page I-11 of the FEIS. The expected future condition of the Forest as it relates to each Planning Question is discussed beginning on Page II-80 of Chapter II of the Plan.

III. WILDERNESS STUDY AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

The following are my recommendations for the Wilderness Study Areas:

WILDERNESS STUDY AREA	TOTAL ACRES	SUITABLE	UNSUITABLE
Sangre de Cristo	218,000	187,169	30,831
Buffalo Peaks	56,950	36,060	20,890
Greenhorn Mountain	22,300	22,300	-0-
Spanish Peaks	19,570	-0-	19,570

The lands recommended suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System for the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area (WSA) include 61,657 acres of the San Isabel and 125,512 acres of the Rio Grande National Forests and 3,300 acres of the 4,910 total acres administered by the Bureau of Land Management, Department of the Interior. Unsuitable lands include 1,610 acres of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management.

The Forest Service, as lead agency, utilized studies and analysis by the Bureau of Land Management (see Appendix C, FEIS), along with the 1964 Wilderness Act and Forest Service policy on capability, availability, and need for wilderness in developing this recommen-

dation. Legislative final environmental impact statements (LFEIS) will be prepared based on information and analysis described in the final EIS for the Plan and an analysis of the record of public meetings and hearings. Each LFEIS and my recommendation, will receive further review and possible modification in the offices of the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States (see Appendix C). The Sangre de Cristo LFEIS will also receive review and possible modification by the Director of BLM and the Secretary of the Interior in regard to the BLM lands involved.

After the President transmits the Administration's final recommendation to Congress, the legislative Final EISs will be filed with the Environmental Protection Agency and distributed to the public.

These recommendations are in response to a legislative mandate in the Wilderness Act of 1980 (PL 96-560) and Section 603 of the Federal Land Policy Management Act (FLPMA) and are not appealable under 36 CFR 211.18 because they are not final decisions. The existing wilderness character of these areas and their potential for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System will be maintained as provided for in section 105(c) of the Act and Section 603 of FLPMA.

IV. DECISION

My decision is to approve Alternative A as the Plan for management of the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Comanche and Cimarron National Grasslands. The Plan is judged to have the greatest public benefit when compared with all alternatives (see Table II-6, page II-48 through II-51 of the FEIS).

I have reviewed the environmental consequences of the Plan and the alternatives to the Plan which are described in the Final EIS. I gave particular attention to public comments on the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan presented in Chapter VI of the Final EIS. I have also reviewed the public issues and management concerns identified during the scoping process for this Plan. These isssues and concerns are listed in the Final EIS, Chapter I, pages I-9 through I-16.

Some of the major aspects of my decision are:

- Treatment of the Forest's vegetation, including timber harvesting is a very important means of achieving the management goals and objectives of the Forest. (See the sections Vegetation, page IV-5 and Timber, page IV-56, in Chapter IV of the FEIS).

- Timber harvest will be set at levels to meet projected demand and treatment arranged to meet multiple objectives even though monetary receipts may be below cost. Cost efficiency of these treatments are achieved through the improved wildlife habitat, increased water yield, improved visitor access, and improving a portion of the recreation objectives of the Plan with no additonal appropriations needed. (See the section, Economic Efficiency, page II-10, Table II-6, page II-48 displaying a

comparison of alternatives and Table II-8, page II-54, Cost Efficiency Analysis in Chapter II of the FEIS).

- Vegetation treatments are designed to maintain a balanced pattern of species and age classes responding to the publics concerns for improving vegetation diversity and maintaining visual quality. (See Timber section, page IV-56 in Chapter IV of the FEIS).

- The Plan selects the harvesting schedule with the fewest acres of clearcutting of any alternative, yet meets management objectives. (See Table II-6, page II-50 in Chapter II of the FEIS).

- Newly constructed and existing roads will be managed to control the amount of vehicular traffic compatible with resource objectives and to reduce resource damage. (See the Facilities Section, page IV-80 in Chapter IV of the FEIS and pages III-74 through III-77 under Management Requirements in Chapter III of the Forest Plan).

- Insect and disease outbreaks will generally not be controlled through application of chemicals and therefore must be controlled through vegetation management of those stands and species most susceptible. (See the Protection section, page IV-83 in Chapter IV of the FEIS).

- The Forest includes outstanding opportunities for wilderness. The recommendations are the most suitable areas for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System and respond to projected national needs through the planning period. (See the section on Wilderness, page III-69, Chapter III of the FEIS).

- Recreation is a major activity and demand for all forms of recreation will increase through the planning period. The Pike and San Isabel National Forests will continue to be a major provider by optimizing recreation experiences and opportunities primarily in dispersed recreation and also in developed recreation in cooperation with other agencies and private enterprise.

- Downhill skiing will be provided in accord with the Regional Guide, primarily through expansion of existing ski areas to meet skier demand.

- The Plan allocates more areas to wildlife habitat management emphasis than any other alternative. Timber sales affecting 8,700 acres per year will be designed specifically to improve wildlife habitat, almost double any other alternative.

- Habitat improvement for threatened and endangered species is more extensive in the Plan than any other alternative.

- Winter range habitat for deer and elk receives stronger emphasis in the Plan. Over 260,000 acres are allocated to winter range habitat protection and management.

V. REASONS FOR THE DECISION

This section describes the rationale forming the basis for my decisions in the Plan. These considerations are derived from the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified through the planning process, as well as from public comments on the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan (Chapter VI of the Final EIS).

No single factor determined the decision. Rather, all factors were considered and weighed on balance in making the decision. Based on consideration of all factors, including monetary and non-monetary costs and benefits, the Plan sets a course which results in the greatest benefit to the public.

A. Response to Public Issues

One of the important reasons for selecting a proposed action is how well it responds to public issues (see Chapter VI of the FEIS). It is virtually impossible for one alternative to respond favorably to all issues equally because many issues are conflicting. I believe the Plan better addresses the public issues than the other alternatives. The major issues and concerns have been combined into the areas described below. (See Table II-5, page II-38, Comparison of Alternatives by Planning Question, in Chapter II of the FEIS).

1. Vegetation Management (including timber harvesting)

Vegetation treatments in the Plan will produce the following results:

- Improved visual quality through maintenance and enhancement of vegetation diversity. The eventual outcome of natural succession would be large areas containing one of two cover types: Douglas-fir/white fir or Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir. Much of the area currently supporting lodgepole pine forest would convert to one of those two types. Virtually all of the aspen type on Colorado's Front Range will eventually succeed to conifers if disturbances are excluded. Aspen is especially appreciated for its contribution to the natural beauty of our forested landscapes; loss of this type to natural succession would have consequences on wildlife habitat, and to recreation and visual quality that are viewed as undesirable by the public. Vegetation treatments in the Plan are designed to maintain a balanced pattern of vegetation throughout the Forest, thereby responding to public concerns regarding vegetation diversity.

- Improved resistance to disease and insect outbreaks. Mature and overmature trees are more susceptible to insects and diseases than stands of young, vigorous trees. While insect and disease epidemics would serve to improve vegetation diversity by arresting natural

succession, they would also have severe and unacceptable effects on vegetation on intermingled lands of other ownerships. Areas affected by insect and disease outbreaks often have reduced value for recreation, watershed protection and visual quality when large areas are involved. These effects are generally unacceptable to the public. The Plan provides for more vegetation treatments in the Douglas-fir/white fir type than any other alternative considered. These treatments are designed to salvage trees killed by the western spruce budworm and increase resistance to budworm attack in the remaining live trees. Spruce budworm is the most serious and widespread pest currently affecting our forest resources.

- Harvest practices. The Plan includes the smallest amount of clearcutting of any of the alternatives considered in detail. The cutting methods to be employed for implementation of the Plan are:

Method	Purpose
Clearcutting (13 percent)	Regeneration of aspen and lodgepole pine; improvement of water yields; horizontal diversity for wildlife habitat; treatment of dwarf mistletoe and other insects or diseases; production of transitional forage.
Selection Cutting (10 percent)	Management of uneven-aged stands of spruce/fir; Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine; vertical diversity for wildlife habitat; vegetation management in sensitive travel corridors and recreation areas
Shelterwood Cutting (62 percent)	Regeneration of even-aged stands of spruce/fir, Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine; maintenance of forest cover in sensitive areas; development of multi-storied stands for wildlife habitat
Commercial Thinning (15 percent)	Maintenance or improvement of growth rates; fuelwood production; increased stand vigor and resistance to insect pests; development of thermal cover component of wildlife habitat

- Continued outputs of wood fiber for a variety of uses. While the demand for sawtimber has been relatively

stable, the consumption of fuelwood, house logs and other "non-traditional" wood products has been steadily increasing. The use of renewable forest resources for production of both sawtimber and fuelwood is a demand that has been addressed by the Plan. The Plan does not emphasize wood fiber outputs, however, as two other alternatives have higher production levels.

In addition, the Plan provides that 12 percent of the area being regenerated will be managed principally for fuelwood production. A continuing supply of fuelwood was a major public concern. The Plan's vegetation treatment program is the principle vehicle for improving wildlife habitat, water yields, recreation access and experiences, insect and disease resistance and this vehicle provides fuelwood and other forest products.

- Maintenance and Improvement of recreation opportunities on the Forest. Even though many commenters stated that vegetation management and recreation opportunities are incompatible, this belief ignores the fact that continued natural succession will result in less vegetation diversity through time. Reduced vegetation diversity translates into less useable wildlife habitat and degraded visual quality. In addition, reduced vegetation management results in fewer access opportunities for dispersed, motorized recreation. All access developed for vegetation management will be available for motorized recreation or non-motorized recreation. Most roads will be closed after project completion. Essentially all existing forest recreation access was developed through the vegetation management program as timber access roads. The Plan better than other alternatives emphasizes maintenance of recreation opportunities by providing vegetative diversity through a balanced vegetation management program. Vegetation diversity provides the widest possible spectrum of recreational settings and experiences.

2. Wildlife and Fish Habitat

Four general wildlife and fish habitat issues, concerns and opportunities are addressed in the Plan. There is a concern that habitat quality is not adequately protected, especially habitats for certain species, such as elk, bighorn sheep, woodpeckers, and fish, and special habitats, such as riparian zones and old growth habitat. The Plan specifies particular management direction, standards, and guidelines to ensure habitat protection. The Plan allocates more acres to wildlife habitat management emphasis prescriptions (517,603 acres) than do the other alternatives, and was formulated to emphasize wildlife and fish resources more than the other alternatives.

Another concern is that management of other resources, such as timber, transportation systems and range, reduce wildlife

and fish habitat quality on the Forest. Under the Plan, wildlife and fish habitat goals and objectives will be considered in all project evaluations. Road and travel management will be used to improve wildlife habitat effectiveness and minimize short term adverse effects. Under the Plan, timber sales affecting 8,700 acres per year will be designed specifically to improve wildlife habitat and meet Forest Service and State habitat objectives. (See the Fish and Wildlife section, page III-78, Chapter III of the FEIS).

A frequent concern has been that the Forest Service does not manage habitats for all wildlife and fish species which occur on the Forest, and that deer and elk are the only species whose habitat is actively managed. Another concern and opportunity is the demand by the public for better quality habitats and larger populations of wildlife and fish. Habitat for threatened and endangered species will be maintained under all alternatives, but more threatened and endangered species habitat will be improved under the Plan. The level of fish habitat improvement is highest of any alternative considered under the Plan. (See the Fish and Wildlife section, page IV-43, Chapter IV of the FEIS).

Implementation of the Plan will result in more diverse habitat conditions than would the other alternatives. This is because more vegetation management projects are located in areas where habitat diversity should be increased to improve habitat conditions. Under the Plan, more acres of aspen, Douglas-fir, and ponderosa pine are scheduled for treatment, which will increase aspen abundance and improve structural stage distribution of fir and pine stands. More introduced openings and edge habitat will be provided, and forest structural diversity will be improved in all forest vegetation types. Appropriate grazing management, tree and shrub propagation, and water developments will be used on the National Grasslands to increase habitat diversity, and improve habitat conditions. Through such treatments, viable populations of all wildlife species will be more readily maintained.

The specific habitat requirements of management indicator species will be best met by Plan Implementation. More acres are improved (9,500 acres per year), and more treatments occur to increase the production of the management indicator species. The Plan provides the best mix of tree species regenerated and cutting systems used to meet the various habitat needs of the management indicator species.

Winter range habitat for deer and elk receives higher emphasis under the Plan than under other alternatives. Over 260,000 acres are allocated to winter range habitat protection and improvement. Forage production will be increased in areas where it limits wintering populations, while at the same time thermal and hiding cover will be maintained.

Because fish and wildlife habitats will be significantly improved under Plan Implementation, populations will increase, or decrease at a slower rate than otherwise would be the case. Opportunities to use fish and wildlife for both consumptive and non-consumptive purposes will therefore be higher. These opportunities will be ensured into the future.

3. Environmental Protection

Protection of the environment was a major area of concern by the public during the comment period. There was concern about the impact of vegetation treatments, road construction and oil and gas development on wildlife, visual quality, water quality and recreation opportunities.

Each alternative could produce some adverse environmental consequences. The Plan will result in a minimum amount of long-term environmental impacts. The environmental effects that cannot be avoided or completely mitigated are listed on pages IV-115 through IV-117 in Chapter IV of the Final EIS.

There are less acres clearcut in the Plan than other alternatives and the vegetation cutting pattern is more dispersed among forest stands and species. This minimizes the physical modification both in terms of area and size of openings compared to other alternatives.

Water quality standards in the Plan meet or exceed State Water Quality Standards. The monitoring plan requires evaluation of proposed project alternatives to assure that established environmental quality standards are met.

4. Access/Travel Management

Some public comments on the DEIS stated concerns that past trends of leaving timber sale roads open following the sale would continue, resulting in an expansion of areas available to off-road vehicle use. There were also concerns that past road closures have not been effective and they doubted that future funding would allow better enforcement. The net effect would be less nonmotorized recreation opportunities and greater disturbances to wildlife. They proposed that fewer roads be constructed even if this meant less vegetation management.

The motorized recreating public commented on the DEIS expressing the concern that at least the current amount of access to the recreation areas they enjoy be maintained. They also expressed interest in expanding motorized opportunities.

The Plan responds to these concerns. The road system will be expanded during implementation of this Plan. However, only 17 of the 32 miles per year indicated in the Plan

are new construction. The rest are reconstruction of existing roads. In most cases, the new construction is associated with vegetation management activities and these roads are usually later closed to motorized use leaving them available for nonmotorized recreation. The 15 miles of reconstruction will result in improved access for the motorized recreationist.

All alternatives would result in similar decisions and management requirements regarding management of roads as open or closed. Road closures will include fencing, obliterating short sections, placing large boulders to block entry and other measures to prevent vehicle use. Travel management planning will include allowances for funds necessary for road closure and enforcement of these closures. Enforcement of road closures and road closure requirements is recognized as a serious problem. Cooperative agreements between the Forest and county governments as well as Forest Service patrols will supplement physical road closure barriers. The Plan provides the best overall access and and travel management program to respond to the publics concern for motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities and to facilitate the resource management and environmental protection concerns voiced by the public. (See the section, Travel Management, page II-67, Chapter II and Transportation System Management, page III-74, Chapter III of the Forest Plan).

5. Wilderness

The Forest planning process incorporated applicable wilderness suitability studies that were directed by Public Law 96-560. The areas that were studied included Buffalo Peaks, Spanish Peaks, Greenhorn Mountain, and Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Areas, and the Lost Creek Further Planning Area. In addition, four small wilderness study areas that are administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) were incorporated into the planning process. The total land area studied included approximately 338,000 acres of National Forest System lands and 4,910 acres of public lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management. The wilderness issue was the question of, "How much of this area is suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System?" The studies concludes that 245,529 acres of National Forest System lands and 3,300 acres of public lands (BLM) are suitable.

The lands that I have recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness System are those which have outstanding wilderness characteristics and opportunities for preservation as wilderness. The lands that are not recommended for inclusion tend to be those which exhibit common characteristics, afford poor opportunities for preservation and can more appropriately and beneficially contribute to other public needs and objectives.

The Plan responds better than any alternative to the need for 1) recommending areas of outstanding wilderness characteristics for wilderness, and 2) recommending non-wilderness for areas needed for other public benefits.

The demand criterion, i.e., how much wilderness is needed for securing for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness, is a difficult criterion to apply. This assessment relates to National as well as local and regional needs. From the practical standpoint, the outcome of our planning most directly affects the people living in the cities and communities along the Front Range of Colorado. The Pike and San Isabel National Forests currently contain (11.6%) 258,838 acres of wilderness. If my recommendations are approved and subsequently enacted by Congress, the Pike and San Isabel National Forests will contain 378,855 acres of wilderness. This amounts to 17 percent of the total combined area of these two Forests.

6. Outdoor Recreation

The basic issues concerning outdoor recreation may be summarized in the question, "what range and quantity of developed and dispersed recreation opportunities should the Pike and San Isabel National Forests provide?".

The planning process responded to this question through consideration of alternatives that provided varying degrees of recreation management emphasis. The alternatives ranged from decreased emphasis through significantly increased emphasis. The Plan best provides recreation management emphasis in the range and quantity of recreation opportunities to keep pace with demand. (See the Recreation section, page II-31, Chapter II of the Plan and the Recreation section, page IV-12 in Chapter IV of the FEIS).

Dispersed Recreation - The Pike and San Isabel National Forests are capable of providing a wide range of recreation opportunities and a high level of use. This capability results from the inherent attractiveness and great diversity of the lands within the Forests.

Actual recreation use and the availability of dispersed recreation opportunities depend on the availability of roads, trails, and parking areas. The condition of the many roads and trails and parking areas is inadequate for projected recreation demands. The Plan best responds to this need with a moderate-level program of road and trail construction and reconstruction, construction of additional parking (trailhead) areas. The Plan utilizes opportunities for increasing dispersed recreation that will occur as the result of roads constructed through the timber sale program. The Plan responds to public concern for

both motorized and non-motorized recreation by providing 55 percent of the acres in urban (1 percent), rural (1 percent), and roaded natural (53 percent) ROS classes where urban influence areas, ski areas, large reservoirs, and high traffic or scenic drive corridors occur. Eighteen percent of the Forest will be managed to provide semi-primitive motorized opportunities. The remaining 27 percent will be managed to provide low user density recreation opportunities away from motorized vehicles.

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Developed Recreation - The Plan provides a higher level of developed recreation capacity than other alternatives. The sites that contribute most toward providing outdoor recreation opportunities are campgrounds. In addition to providing opportuntities for camping, they serve as basis for pursuing other recreation activities. The quantity and condition of the Forests' existing campgrounds are generally adequate for serving current demand. Existing picnic areas tend to be under-utilized, except at the most popular day-use areas. The Plan maintains the present quantity of developed sites during the next decade. For this reason, a schedule for constructing new sites was not developed. Needs and opportunities for the construction of new sites and the expansion of existing sites are expected to occur as the result of unexpected influences, changes in technology and social conditions, and as the result of continued analyses of use and its effects. As this demand develops, it is also expected that private enterprise will respond with additional developed site capacity on private lands. The Plan contains sufficient developed site capacity to respond to these future demands as they develop.

Winter Sports Sites - All of the alternatives that were considered in the planning process addressed the downhill skiing recreation activity in a similar manner. Specifically, all alternatives would seek to increase opportunities for skiing in response to demand and to the extent of suitable and available sites.

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During the next two decades, the Plan will meet expected demand through the opportunties that exist for expanding existing sites. During the third decade it will be necessary to develop new sites in order to meet demand.

Opportunities for developing new sites appea to be limited. Five potential sites were evaluated during the planning process. Based on those evaluations, only two (Burning Bear and Quail Mountain) have been allocated to a prescription which protects the winter sports potential. The Plan provides the opportunity to further study these sites if such studies are requested and funded by State and local governments and the private sector.

B. Compatibility With Other Public Agency Goals and Plans

The goals and plans of other public agencies which could be affected by National Forest System management were considered

early in the planning process and were used to help develop the alternatives in the Draft EIS. The Final EIS considered these, plus additional agency goals. See Chapter VI, pages VI-178 through VI-262 in the FEIS for public agency comments on the Draft EIS and Proposed Plan.

The Plan is the alternative most compatible with the goals and objectives expressed by the State of Colorado. In particular, the Proposed Action best integrates the recreation opportunities and needs identified by the State of Colorado Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan and meets the National Forest share of wildlife habitat management goals expressed by the State of Colorado, Division of Wildlife and the Kansas Fish and Game Commission.

County governments commenting on the Proposed Plan generally supported the goals of the Plan. They share the concerns of the State about retaining the environmental quality of the Forest. Considering all the Counties and their concerns, the Plan is the action most compatible with County governments concerns.

Other agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of the Interior, (Office of Environmental Project Review) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have concerns dealing with specific guidelines or programs, such as water quality management on the National Grasslands or threatened and endangered species. (See agency comment letters on pages VI-178 through VI-262 in Chapter VI of the FEIS.) All the alternatives adequately provide for mitigation of these concerns. (See Chapter III of the Plan.)

C. Stability of Industries Needed to Produce Regional Levels of Goods and Services

A major consideration in approving the Plan is the manner in which it affects industry and local communities. The Plan enhances all resources while providing a continuous flow of wood, water, forage, recreation opportunity, and wildlife commodity benefits for use by industry and local communities. The Plan provides balanced increases in all of these resources in response to public demands.

The Plan maintains or increases wood, water, forage, recreation, and wildlife habitat, but at levels that will avoid conflicts across resources.

D. Social and Economic Stability

Effects on minority groups, distribution of goods and services, payment of taxes, receipts, payments to local governments, and income and employment were considered in selecting the Plan.

The Plan does not introduce any change which would significantly alter existing social structures. The Plan will maintain or increase slightly the economic stability of local communities affected by Forest management.

The Plan promotes continuation of existing lifestyles which are dependent upon use and management of the Forest. Emphasis on vegetation treatment, and continued emphasis on livestock grazing will help maintain the existing rural lifestyle where it occurs on the planning area. Providing for ski area expansion, meeting demand for dispersed recreation, and meeting a substantial portion of the increased demand in developed recreation should benefit the tourism industry.

The decision to select Alternative A as the Plan was based in part on the following positive benefits:

- Minorities and Women - Some minorities and women will be hired directly by the Agency. Other opportunities for minorities and women will be through Forest Service contracts and permits. In the Plan, approximately 10 percent of the dollar value of all contracts will be set aside to develop minority and women contractors. Much of the employment generated by tourism, which is expected to increase, is service oriented and should benefit all minority groups.

- Distribution of Goods and Services- There will be an increase in livestock forage production, and diversity of recreation opportunities, including downhill skiing, hunting, and fishing. Water production and wildlife winter range carrying capacity will increase.

- Local Taxes - There will be direct correlation between increased levels of economic activity generated by implementation of the Plan and the taxes collected by governments.

- Receipts - Receipts collected by the Federal government will increase as a result of charging for firewood, an increase in permitted livestock numbers, and increased developed recreation opportunities such as ski area development.

- Payments to Local Governments - Local governments will benefit financially as their share of receipts increase commensurate with increased supplies of goods and services.

- Income - Income to those economic sectors affected by implementation of the Plan is expected to increase. (See economic Effect section, page IV 87, Chapter IV, of the FEIS.)

- Employment - The Plan will contribute to employment stability as economic diversity is increased through maintaining timber, livestock, and recreation resource availability from public lands.

E. Energy Efficiency

The Plan provides for resource management and for recreation use levels which are higher than several of the alternatives with lower management intensities, thus, causing it to rank highest in total energy required (Chapter IV, page IV-113, Energy Requirements).

F. Economic Efficiency

The Plan has an estimated present net value (PNV) of $189.6 million dollars using a 4 percent discount rate. The significance of the present net value figure is discussed in detail on pages II-10 through II-11, pages IV-87 through IV-92, pages IV-94 through IV-96 and in Appendix E of the FEIS. While the Plan has the second highest PNV, I conclude that it will produce the greatest net public benefits.

The Plan emphasizes public benefits that will be derived from managing vegetation to control insect and disease pests, improve wildlife habitat and maintain suitable recreational settings. Accomplishment of those objectives entails management of Douglas-fir and ponderosa pine forests, even though they are less economically efficient because of higher regeneration costs. Other alternatives do not emphasize the non-valued public benefits specifically included in the Plan. For example, the Plan includes levels of Douglas-fir management in selected areas to salvage spruce budworm mortality and in other locations to improve wildlife habitat. Other alternatives include less than half as much Douglas-fir treatment because it is economically more efficient to concentrate vegetative treatment in larger clear cuts along existing roads and in species that yield higher dollar returns. This approach places emphasis on monetary benefits and therefore develops a higher PNV but does not consider impacts on visual quality, soil and water quality and wildlife populations. The Plan in contrast, selects vegetative treatments that are most beneficial to wildlife, to recreational opportunities, to sustained water production and to maintaining a healthy forest over the entire planning period. (See section, Physical and Biological Future, page II-81, Chapter II in the Plan.

The Plan therefore will result in highest net public benefits because it provides:

- Highest level of recreation capacity
- Second highest level of trail construction
- Timber products to meet projected demand
- Highest level of livestock grazing
- Highest level of wildlife and fish habitat improvement
- Second highest recommended areas for wilderness designation
- Second highest PNV
- Best silvicultural approach for controlling insect and disease mortality

G. Changes in Management Direction

The Forest planning process included a determination of the need to change management direction. This was accomplished by assessing the current situation and reviewing public and management issues and concerns. Changes in management are incorporated in the Plan as follows:

- Activities will be monitored, project effectiveness will be determined, and modifications made on a planned annual basis.
- Accelerated activity in designating roads open, closed, or removed from the system will be based on maintenance costs, resource objectives, and user safety.
- Increased rate of wildlife and fish habitat improvement.
- Increase in the quantity and quality of developed recreation opportunities.
- Increase in quantity of firewood available.
- Reduction in timber harvest levels from current levels identified in forest timber management plans.

VI. DECISION PROCESS

A. Alternatives Including the Proposed Action

The alternative formulation process is summarized in the Final EIS, pages II-1 through II-10. Alternatives changed slightly between the Draft and Final EIS. The major change was to modify the alternatives in the first 10 years to meet lower projected budgets.

Five alternatives were considered in detail. They were formulated by applying combinations of management area prescriptions to achieve the overall goals and objectives of the individual alternative. Each alternative considered in detail, incorporates a common set of management standards and guidelines to ensure true "multiple use" management, as well as mitigation measures which protect environmental quality. Each alternative represents a technically and legally feasible system for managing the Forest. The alternatives address the planning questions differently; all consider anticipated changes in demand for Forest resources. (See Table II-5, page II-38, Chapter II of the FEIS.)

A brief description of the five alternatives considered in detail follows:

ALTERNATIVE A (Proposed Action)

This alternative emphasizes recreation, wilderness plus commodity values and income producing goods and services, and pro-

vides a high level of noncommodity outputs. Wildlife and fish habitat would be improved, water yield would increase, and recreation opportunities would be improved if this alternative is implemented. In addition, moderate levels of commodity outputs such as wood fiber and livestock production would result, primarily because of using vegetation treatment as a tool to increase water yield, improve wildlife habitat, and treat insect and disease problems. This alternative recommends wilderness suitability for 187,169 acres of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area (61,657 acres of the San Isabel and 125,512 acres of the Rio Grande National Forest and 3,300 acres of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management), 36,060 acres of the Buffalo Peaks Wilderness Study Area, and 22,300 acres of the Greenhorn Mountain Wilderness Study Area for a total of 245,529 acres for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. It also includes 71,291 acres of Wilderness Study Areas recommended unsuitable for wilderness. Unsuitable areas include Buffalo Peaks (20,890 acres), Spanish Peaks (19,570 acres), and 30,831 acres of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area. The Lost Creek Further Planning Area (20,723 acres) is determined as unsuitable for wilderness.

ALTERNATIVE D (Current Program - No Action)

This alternative continues current management direction using goals and objectives from existing plans. This is the required "no action" alternative that provides a basis for comparison with other alternatives. Moderate levels of commodity and noncommodity outputs would result from the implementation of this alternative. This alternative recommends wilderness suitability for 216,700 acres of the Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Area (86,000 acres on the San Isabel and 130,700 acres on the Rio Grande National Forest). Slight boundary adjustments are proposed from the original study area boundary to eliminate conflicts with other uses, specifically private land inholdings and motorized recreation uses on the San Isabel National Forest. These adjustments total 1,300 acres. It also includes 98,820 acres of Wilderness Study Area recommended unsuitable for wilderness. Unsuitable areas include: Buffalo Peaks (56,950 acres), Spanish Peaks (19,570 acres), and Greenhorn Mountain (22,300 acres). The Lost Creek Further Planning Area (20,723 acres) is recommended as not suitable for wilderness.

ALTERNATIVE C (1980 RPA PROGRAM)

This alternative attempts to meet the Regional goals described in the Rocky Mountain Regional Guide and the Forests' portion of the 1980 Resources Planning Act (RPA) program targets. This emphasis would be achieved by managing all resources for a high level of outputs. This alternative recommends wilderness suitability for 316,820 acres of the Buffalo Peaks, Spanish Peaks, Greenhorn Mountain, and Sangre de Cristo Wilderness Study Areas. All of the Lost Creek Further Planning Area (20,723 acres) is recommended as suitable for wilderness. Vegetative treatment is based on the best economic opportunity without regard for providing other resource benefits.

ALTERNATIVE D (Market Opportunities)

This output alternative emphasizes market opportunities and values and would provide the highest level of commodity outputs. Noncommodity outputs would be produced at an acceptable level. Current management direction could be followed for recreation, wildlife and watershed management. Wood products, livestock production, and minerals development would be emphasized. In this alternative, none of the Wilderness Study Areas or Further Planning Area are recommended as suitable for wilderness.

ALTERNATIVE E (Reduced Budget)

This alternative emphasizes market opportunities and values and would provide for a moderate-high level of commodity outputs within constrained budget limitations. Noncommodity outputs would be produced at an acceptable, but reduced, level. Wood products, livestock production and mineral development would be emphasized. In this alternative, none of the Wilderness Study Areas or Further Planning Area are recommended suitable for wilderness.

B. Environmentally Preferable Alternative

When all physical, biological, social and economic factors are aggregated, the Plan is the environmentally preferable alternative.

The Plan provides the opportunity for vegetation treatments which will result in long-term environmental benefits, such as improved wildlife and fish habitat diversity, water yield increases, and a healthier forest that would not occur under other alternatives. In addition, there are economic opportunities for industries related to timber, range, and recreation. There will be a continuous flow of Forest goods and services which complement the social environment of local communities. Achieving these objectives while mitigating impacts, makes the Plan the environmentally preferable alternative.

Potential adverse physical and biological impacts normally will be mitigated by implementation of the management direction in Chapter III of the Plan. There are some effects that cannot be avoided. These are described in pages IV-115 through IV-117 in Chapter IV of the Final EIS. There will also be additional environmental analysis as appropriate for specific projects to provide an opportunity to mitigate or avoid environmental impacts.

C. Public Participation

The Forest Service conducted an active public involvement program. Federal, State, and local agencies have been informed and consulted throughout the planning effort. Forest users have had an opportunity to participate. See Chapter VI, page VI-1 of the Final EIS for a description of the public participation activities that were undertaken.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the Plan was published in the Federal Register on May 10, 1979. Notice of Availability of Draft EIS and Proposed Plan was published in the Federal Register on September 24, 1982, and announced by area news media. Over 700 copies of the Proposed Plan and Draft EIS, and 830 copies of the Summary were distributed to the public. Public meetings were held during the comment period which lasted through December 15, 1982. Over 1,000 individuals and Federal, State and local agency representatives commented on the Proposed Plan and Draft EIS. All comments were considered in preparation of the final documents and selection of the Proposed Action as the Plan.

More specific information concerning public participation may be found in Chapter VI of the Final EIS.

D. Planning Records

Planning records contain the detailed information and decisions used in developing the Plan and EIS as required in 36 CFR 219.5(b) through (k) (1979). Similar activities are required in the 1982 NFMA regulations (36 CFR 219.12).

All of the documentation chronicling the Forest planning process are available for inspection and review during regular business hours (8:00 AM - 5:00 PM) at:

Forest Supervisors Office
Pike and San Isabel National Forests
1920 Valley Drive
Pueblo, Colorado

These records are incorporated by reference into the Final EIS and Plan.

VII. IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND MITIGATION

The Plan will not be implemented sooner than 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Plan, EIS, and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Plan will vary depending on the type of project. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Plan within the first year of implementation.

Existing projects, as well as contractual obligations, will continue as originally planned. During implementation, however, the following minimum requirements, subject to valid existing rights, will be met. The Forest Supervisor will assure that (1) annual program proposals and projects are consistent with the Plan; (2) program budget proposals and objectives are consistent with management direction specified in the Plan; and (3) implementation is in compliance with the Regional Guide and 36 CFR 219.10(e), 36 CFR 219.11(d), and 36 CFR 219.27.

Implementation is guided by the management requirements contained in the Forest Direction and Management Area Prescriptions which are found in Chapter III of the Plan. These management requirements were developed through an interdisciplinary effort and contain measures necessary to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse effects. To the best of my knowledge, all practical mitigation measures have been adopted and are included in Chapter III of the Plan.

Proposals to use National Forest System (NFS) lands will be reviewed for consistency with the Plan. Management Direction contained in Chapter III of the Plan will be used to analyze any proposal involving use of NFS lands. All permits, contracts, and other instruments for occupancy and use of the NFS lands must be consistent with the Management Direction in Chapter III. This is required by 16 USC 1604(i) and 36 CFR 219.10(e).

The purpose of the monitoring program is two-fold: (1) to evaluate whether Forest Plan goals and objectives are being realized, and (2) to determine the on-the-ground effects of the management activities (36 CFR 219.12(k)).

The monitoring program is described in detail in Chapter IV of the Plan. At intervals established in the monitoring program, an assessment will be made of whether the management objectives have been met and how closely management requirements have been followed. The results of monitoring and evaluation will be used to measure the progress of the Plan implementation. These results will also help to determine when Plan amendments are needed. Plan amendments will require public notice to amend and solicitation of public input.

VIII. APPEAL PROCEDURES

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be in writing and submitted to:

James F. Torrence, Regional Forester
Rocky Mountain Region
USDA Forest Service
11177 West 8th Avenue
Lakewood, Colorado 80225

Appeal notice must be submitted within 45 days from the date of this decision. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.

James F. Torrence
JAMES F. TORRENCE
Regional Forester

11/18/84
Date