



Land and Resource Management Plan Revision

Kiowa, Rita Blanca, Black Kettle and McClellan Creek National Grasslands

Background: In 1996, we began revising the 1985 *Land and Resource Management Plan* (Plan) for the Cibola National Forest and Grasslands. From 1996 to 1999, the Forest collaborated with the public through workshops, notices and newsletters to develop a set of *Geographic Area Assessments* that describe existing and desired conditions. In 2000, the Plan revision process was postponed due to uncertainty regarding planning regulations and budgets.

Status: The Forest is now re-initiating Plan revision, which will be divided into two distinct phases and two separate Plans: one for our four National Grasslands and one for the mountain districts of the National Forest. We will begin with the Grasslands Plan and expect to complete it in 18-24 months. By the end of 2007, we will begin revising the Plan for the mountain districts.

Grasslands Plan: The Grasslands Plan will include these National Grasslands:

- Kiowa National Grassland in northeastern New Mexico,
- Rita Blanca National Grassland in the Oklahoma and Texas panhandles,
- Black Kettle National Grassland in western Oklahoma and the Lake Marvin area of the Texas panhandle, and
- McClellan Creek National Grassland in the Texas panhandle.

Process and New Regulations: The Plan revision process will emphasize multiple opportunities for public participation. We will revise the plan in accordance with the 2005 forest planning regulations at 36 CFR 219, commonly referred to as the *planning rule*. We will also follow Forest Service planning directives contained in the *Forest Service Manual 1920* and *Forest Service Handbook 1909.12*. Draft directives were released in the Federal Register for public comment and are expected to be finalized by the spring of 2006.

How the Plan Will Change: Under the new planning rule and directives, the Plan is to become more strategic and less detailed or prescriptive. The revised Plan will provide a framework for the detailed site-specific planning, public involvement and environmental analysis conducted for each proposed project.

For example, changes to Plans under the new planning rule include the following:

The revised Plan will not mandate that specific projects or actions be taken, but will identify desired conditions and strategic objectives. It will include a monitoring program to evaluate progress in meeting the desired conditions and objectives.

The revised Plan will no longer contain standard procedures to follow, but will identify some flexible management guidelines. Guidelines will not repeat direction contained in laws, regulations or policies. Procedural “how to” requirements will be housed in FS Manuals and Handbooks.

The revised Plan will no longer make decisions about where certain lands uses are prohibited or unsuitable. While Plans will identify where certain land uses are *generally* suitable/unsuitable, land use restrictions or prohibitions will only be changed through decisions made at the site-specific project planning stage.

The revised Plan will no longer require a detailed environmental analysis or EIS document because the revised Plan will not commit the agency to taking specific on-the-ground actions. Instead, there will be a broad-scale evaluation of how the revised Plan addresses ecological, social and economic sustainability.

The revised Plan will no longer require alternatives to be developed and analyzed, although Plan options may be developed if needed. The goal is to work collaboratively with the public as partners in developing a proposed Plan that will have broad public acceptance.

The revised Plan will not involve starting all over again, but instead will focus on the most important changes needed in the current Plan. The Forest Service will work with the public on the evaluating which elements in the Plan are most important to change at this time.

The revised Plan will be evaluated at least annually to check progress and determine if additional changes are needed. The planning rule allows for Plan amendments to be completed in less time so that Plans will be more easily and regularly updated.

First Step: The Southwestern Region of the Forest Service is developing a regional strategy for revising Plans for the 11 Forests and Grasslands in the region. In addition, the Regional Office is working with contractors and universities to provide each Forest with assessments of ecological and socio-economic conditions and trends, specifically tailored to each National Forest and Grassland.

Results from all available assessments, inventories and monitoring reports will be used along with a public participation process to prepare a draft *Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER)*. The CER will describe the conditions and trends on the Grasslands that affect ecological and socio-economic sustainability, and how the current Plan and other management direction influences those trends. With this information we can determine what needs to be changed in the Grasslands Plan to better contribute to ecological and socio-economic sustainability in the future.

Future Steps in the Process: After the CER is complete and the need-for-change is clear, we will continue collaborating with the interested public to create a proposed Grasslands Plan with these key components:

- Vision: desired conditions
- Strategy: management objectives, generally suitable uses and special areas
- Design Criteria: guidelines
- Monitoring Program

How to Get Involved in the Grasslands Plan Revision Process:

- Request to be on the Grasslands Plan Revision mailing list
- Include your e-mail address if you wish to receive Plan revision newsletters and draft documents via e-mail (to save paper, cost and time).
- Please let us know if you would like our planning staff to do a short presentation and question/answer session at one of your group's meetings.

We plan on holding public workshops on revising the Plan for the National Grasslands primarily in Clayton NM, and Cheyenne or Elk City OK. Please let us know if you would like to attend a workshop in another location.

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