

Caribou-Targhee NF

Caribou-Targhee NF  
1405 Hollipark Dr.  
Idaho Falls, ID 83401  
(208) 557-5760

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# Final Environmental Impact Statement

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Caribou Revised Forest Plan  
Chapter One—Purpose and Need

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## Introduction to the Final Environmental Impact Statement

The Caribou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1985) currently directs management of the Caribou National Forest; this plan is over fifteen years old. The Forest Supervisor has determined that important changes have taken place since the implementation of the current management plan in 1985. Revision of management plans is directed by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) Regulations, 36 Code Federal Regulations (CFR) 219 and the Forest Service Directives System (Forest Service Handbook 1909.12).

This Caribou LRMP Revision was initiated under the 1982 Planning Regulations (36 CFR 219) when the Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was issued in August 1999. The Forest Service then revised the Forest Planning regulations through a year-long rule-making process that was completed in November 2000. The revised planning rule established new direction for conducting forest planning. Since the Caribou Revision started prior to the Final Rule, the Forest decided to complete the Revision using the 1982 Regulations while incorporating some of the ideas of the new regulations.

The Forest issued a Proposed Action (Alternative 2) to address the needs for change identified in the Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The public and the Forest managers identified nine significant issues that would drive the formulation of Alternatives to the original Proposal. This EIS presents the analysis upon which the Regional Forester will base his decision for the Caribou Revised Forest Plan.

**Alternative 7R is the Agency's Selected Alternative.**

### THE PLANNING UNIT

The Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest (NF) is located in southeastern Idaho and overlaps into Wyoming and Utah. In the spring of 2000 the Caribou NF and Targhee NF were officially combined. The Targhee NF revised its Forest Plan in 1997 and will continue to be managed under the guidance of that document. The Caribou-Targhee NF administrative unit also includes the Curlew National Grassland (NG). The Curlew NG is managed under its own management plan, completed in the spring of 2002. Thus, the Caribou Revised Forest Plan addresses management of the Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest, hereinafter referred to as the "Caribou" or the "Forest". The Caribou is broken into three Ranger Districts: Westside, Soda Springs and Montpelier.

The Caribou lies mainly within the northern extent of the Great Basin Region. In general, it is an area of low effective precipitation and harsh climatic conditions. The Caribou is an area of high, rugged mountain ranges rising sharply from semi-arid sagebrush plains and agricultural valleys. Forestlands occupy approximately 50 percent of the Caribou, mainly above 6,000 feet in elevation. These areas support stands of Douglas-fir, subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and aspen. Shrubs such as sagebrush, rabbitbrush, maple, or juniper dominate the non-forested areas. The Caribou provides a wide variety of diverse habitats for the 334 species of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife known or suspected to occur on the Forest. Five species listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) are also associated with the Caribou. The water bodies on the Caribou provide habitat for a variety of aquatic, plant, insect, and fish species, including the Bonneville and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

The Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee encompasses eleven counties in three states. Bannock County, a retail and commercial hub for southeastern Idaho, is at the center of this “zone of influence.” Several urban centers use the Caribou-Targhee NF for recreation and commercial uses.

## Purpose and Need

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### PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement in conjunction with a revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan (hereinafter referred to as the Revised Forest Plan) for the Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. This Revised Forest Plan will do the following:

- Establish multiple-use goals and objectives [36 CFR 219.11]
- Establish forest-wide management requirements (standards and guidelines)
- Establish management areas and management area direction through the application of management prescriptions
- Identify lands not suited for timber production [36 CFR 219.7(d)]
- Identify lands not suited for livestock forage production [36 CFR 219.7(d)]
- Establish monitoring and evaluation requirements
- Recommend areas for official designation of Wilderness

The authorization of project-level activities on the Forest occurs through separate project, or site-specific, decision-making. Project-level decisions must comply with National

Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures and must include a determination that the project is consistent with the Forest Plan. The proposed action does not address specific project actions but will set the Forest-wide direction that frames those actions.

Regulations found in [36 CFR 219.12 (b)] require the Forest Supervisor to determine the major public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities to be addressed in the planning process. The combined effects of the needed changes demand attention through plan revision or amendment. The major revision topics described below influenced the decision to revise management for the Caribou NF. Taken collectively, these “needs for change” are the major topics for the Caribou Forest Plan Revision. The Forest Supervisor has determined that changes in resource conditions, technical knowledge, data improvement, or public opinion of national forest resource management have created a need to change management direction for the Caribou NF.

Alternative 2, described in Chapter 2 of this DEIS, is the detailed Proposed Action.

## **DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

The existing management plan is more than ten years old. The Forest Supervisor has determined important changes have taken place since the implementation of the current management plan. It established key decisions for the long-term management of National Forest System lands. These include:

1. Establishment of forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives, including the description of the desired future condition (DFC) [36 CFR 219.11]
2. Establishment of forest-wide management requirements (standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604, (The National Forest Management Act) applying to future activities [resource integration requirements 36 CFR 219.13 to 36 CFR 219.27]
3. Establishment of management areas and direction applying to future activities in each management area [36 CFR 219.11(c)]
4. Determination of the suitability and potential capability of lands for producing timber and forage for grazing animals, [36 CFR 219.14 and .20], and designation of lands not suitable for such activities
5. Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements found in [36 CFR 219.11(d)]
6. Recommendation of Roadless Areas to Congress for Wilderness classification [36 CFR 219.17]

The revision of the Caribou Forest Plan will include decisions on these six elements of programmatic direction. These first stage Forest Plan decisions establish the direction which allows or restricts future project level proposals. The Record of Decision (ROD), issued at the

conclusion of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, will select one Alternative for implementation as the Caribou Revised Forest Plan. Decisions made in the final ROD apply only to the Caribou portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest lands and not on lands under other private or public ownership. The Revised Forest Plan provides the overall guidance (goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area direction) to achieve the desired future condition for the area analyzed and contains specific management area prescriptions for the Forest.

The authorization of project-level activities within the planning area occurs through project decision-making, the second stage of forest planning. Project-level decisions must comply with NEPA procedures and must include a determination that the project is consistent with the management plan. No project-level decisions will be made in this planning process, such as permitted levels of livestock grazing, timber sale projects, or whether specific roads or trails are open or closed. These concerns will be addressed in separate NEPA analyses and decisions that include public involvement and site-specific environmental effects disclosure.

## **PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION**

Generally, Forest Plan revision does not result in a wholesale change of management direction. Accordingly, the Forest Plan revision will concentrate on management direction that needs improvement or clarity, incorporates new scientific findings, or is required by regulation. Current management direction that has proven effective and requires no change will continue forward, as is, through the analysis process. In revising the Forest Plan, the regulations focus the process by stating: "The Forest Supervisor shall determine the major public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities to be addressed in the planning process" [36 CFR 219.12(b)]. Throughout this planning process portions of the Plan, identified as "needs for change," will be emphasized. Needs for Change" are listed by the issue(s) they prompted.

The Forest completed two five-year monitoring reports, one in 1992 and a second in the fall of 1997. Using the results and findings in the monitoring reports, public input, and Forest Plan implementation experience, needs for change in management direction were identified. Several sources were used in determining the needs for changes in the current Forest Plan. These sources include:

- Public comments concerning implementation of current direction
- Findings from the two Forest Plan monitoring reports
- Regulatory, manual, and handbook requirements
- Draft 1995 Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program
- New information, such as the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Plan Scientific Assessment and other research

- Public comments received regarding the findings in the Initial Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS)

## **ANALYSIS OF THE MANAGEMENT SITUATION (RESOURCE CONDITIONS)**

In April 1999, the Caribou National Forest published an Initial Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS). The AMS described current management and resource conditions on the Forest. Based on these conditions, forest managers and resource specialists identified significant "needs for change" and proposed a desired range of future conditions for forest resources. "Needs for change" included subject areas that:

- Must be reviewed in accordance with federal regulations (timberland suitability, Wild & Scenic Rivers, and roadless area reviews for Wilderness recommendation);
- Are urgent resource issues that need improved direction as identified through monitoring or other scientific assessments relative to the Forest;
- Are concerns the public identified through site-specific project implementation of the 1985 Forest Plan

Some examples of issues that were evaluated during the development of the AMS and not identified as needs for change include lands programs, small hydropower, and other special uses.

The AMS was mailed to more than five hundred interested individuals, non-government organizations, city, county and state governments, and other federal agencies. Public comments were encouraged regarding the findings disclosed in the AMS. As a result of the analysis of the comments received, the Forest Supervisor determined the public identified additional "needs for change" that will be included in the Forest Plan Revision. These additional "needs for change" are listed by the issue(s) they prompted

The Forest compiled responses to public comments received on the AMS. The Responses to Public Comments are available upon request from the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The AMS and the Responses to Comments represent the Final "Analysis of the Management Situation" and conclude this step of the revision process.

## **DESIRED FUTURE CONDITION**

The condition of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems is addressed through the desired range of future conditions (DFCs). The DFCs address vegetation cover types, their structure and composition, disturbance patterns, wildlife habitats, watershed processes, riparian conditions, and aquatic species habitats. The desired range of future conditions is a narrative vision of the long-term condition of the land that could be expected in 50 to 100 years if objectives in the selected Alternative are achieved. Alternatives may result in different long-term conditions, or

objectives may take longer to achieve. The proposed Desired Range of Future Conditions is detailed in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 of the Initial AMS and will not be reiterated here.

## **RESPONSIBLE OFFICIAL**

The Responsible Official for the Caribou Revision and final Decision is the Intermountain Regional Forester in Ogden, Utah.

## **FRAMEWORK FOR THE DECISION**

The Regional Forester will decide which alternative best meets the needs for future management of the Caribou National Forest. This alternative will be reflected in the desired future conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines in the Revised Plan. The decision and Revised Plan will include management direction, land allocations, monitoring, and mitigation.

# Management Direction

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## **TRIBAL TRUST RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has ancestral Treaty Rights to uses of the Forest. The relationship of the United States government with American Indian tribes is based on legal agreements between sovereign nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting and fishing rights to tribal members on “all unoccupied lands of the United States.” This right applies to all public domain lands reserved for National Forest purposes that are presently administered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. These rights are still in effect, and management actions recognize these rights. Consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council is required on land management activities and land allocations that could affect these rights.

## **FOREST PLANNING REGULATIONS**

The Caribou Forest Plan Revision has been underway since August 1999. The planning team was approaching release of the DEIS and Draft Revised Plan for public review and comment when the Forest Service released new regulations for implementing the National Forest Management Act. Because of the timing and stage of the Caribou Revision at that time, the Regional Forester decided to proceed under the original 1982 Planning Rule. The intent of the new regulations—science-based ecosystem management, social and economic sustainability;

interdisciplinary, integrated planning; collaborative citizen participation; and dynamic, realistic plans—can be achieved by continuing under the 1982 Planning Rule for this revision of the Caribou Forest Plan.

## **ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT**

The following Ecosystem Management Goals provide a framework for Forest planning that merges science and ecosystem capability with societal values to help make choices about dynamic systems on the Forest. These overarching forest-wide goals are the ecological centerpiece for the Forest Plan Revision:

- Maintain ecological processes
- Manage in the context of multiple ecological scales and time frames
- Maintain viable populations of native and desired non-native species
- Encourage social and economic resiliency
- Recognize the human concept of "sense of place"
- Manage to maintain the mix of ecosystem goods, functions, and conditions that society wants

The northern portion of the Caribou National Forest is within the area of land covered by the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP). The integrated science assessments from this effort have been used in developing direction and assessing conditions and trends for the Forest. The integrated science assessments contain information that provide context at a broad, multiple-state scale. The information on forestlands, rangelands, aquatic and hydrologic integrity, ecosystem pathways and disturbance patterns, and the current and projected conditions of fish, wildlife and plant species was used to help identify need for change topics.

Other broad scale assessments and direction have been incorporated, as appropriate, into the Caribou Revision. Direction from conservation strategies and agreements such as the Lynx Conservation Assessment and Strategy (LCAS) and cutthroat trout strategies has been tailored to the Caribou and included in the Plan.

## **FOREST AND RANGELAND RENEWABLE RESOURCES PLANNING ACT (RPA), 2000**

The 1982 NFMA regulations at [36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)] require at least one Alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each national forest/grassland as displayed in regional guides. However, the RPA Program establishes national guidance for the national forests/grasslands by providing program emphasis and trend rather than specific, quantified output targets for individual Forest Service programs. As a result, no resource objectives were quantified for each region to display in regional guides, which would then be passed on to individual forests/grasslands.

The RPA is updated every five years and has three components: (1) roles in natural resource management for Forest Service management; (2) Forest Service program responses to contemporary issues; and (3) long-term strategies to guide the program development and budget process. It emphasizes four high priority themes: (1) recreation, wildlife, and fisheries resource enhancement; (2) environmentally acceptable commodity production, (3) improved scientific knowledge about natural resources; and (4) response to global resource issues. This guidance was used in developing action Alternatives for the DEIS and the Selected Alternative, Alternative 7R. For purposes of the analysis Alternative 7R has been identified as the most consistent with RPA and is discussed in more detail in the Record of Decision.

## **NATIONAL FIRE PLAN**

The National Fire Plan (NFP) was developed primarily in response to several situations: the 2000 fire season in the West, the Forest Service Report to the President, and the funding allocation from Congress. The NFP emphasizes five key points:

- Keypoint 1 Firefighting Resources
- Keypoint 2 Rehabilitation and Restoration
- Keypoint 3 Hazardous Fuel Reduction
- Keypoint 4 Community Assistance
- Keypoint 5 Accountability

The Caribou Plan Revision addresses the NFP, particularly Keypoints 2 and 3, by emphasizing hazardous fuel reduction in areas at risk of uncharacteristic wildland fires by providing direction for rehabilitation and restoration. The NFP calls for working with communities to reduce fire risk, particularly in the wildland urban interface. The Revision addresses this issue in the action alternatives and the proposed Plan. Keypoints 1 and 4 are budget driven and therefore not addressed directly by the Plan. Keypoint 5 is a reporting and monitoring item.

## **NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM ROAD MANAGEMENT RULE**

In January of 2001, the Forest Service issued the final National Forest System Road Management Rule. This rule revises regulations concerning the management, use, and maintenance of the National Forest Transportation System. According to the Rule, Forests must complete a Roads Analysis prior to completing the Forest Plan revision. The roads analysis is designed to provide decision-makers with information to manage road systems that are safe and responsive to public needs and desires, are economically and efficiently managed, and have minimal negative ecological effects on the land. This Roads Analysis has been completed as part of the planning process. It is available upon request from the Caribou-Targhee National Forest Headquarters in Idaho Falls, Idaho.

# Issues/Public Involvement

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Throughout the planning process, the interdisciplinary team (IDT) gathered public input on issues, the proposed action, and Alternatives to the proposed action. Issues were developed from IDT resource concerns, management “needs for change” as summarized in the Initial Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS), and public comments received through the official scoping process, public meetings, and other public involvement tools, such as the “Build Your Own Alternative Exercise.”

Preliminary issues were identified through public comments received on the Initial AMS and from Scoping on the Proposed Action. Issues were grouped into categories. The IDT further refined and clarified the issues and presented a preliminary briefing to Forest Management Team members on November 3, 1999. A package of preliminary issues was finalized for use in public meetings during December 1999.

The scoping process included a public meeting, briefings with interested stakeholders, letters and updates, and the development of a web homepage. These activities were used to identify the issues, Alternatives, and concerns to be considered in the development of a Revised Land and Resource Management Plan and to keep the public informed and involved throughout the planning process. (See Chapter 6 for a full discussion of public involvement activities.)

Nine significant planning issues were identified through this public process:

- Access and Recreation Management
- Economics
- Ecosystem Management
- Livestock Grazing
- Minerals Operations, Reclamation and Hazardous Substances Management
- Riparian/Wetland Areas, Aquatic Habitat and Water Quality
- Timber Sale Program
- Recommended Wilderness and Roadless Area Management
- Wildlife Habitat Management

Each of the issue statements is written in an attempt to be unbiased, to show conflicts, and to be as specific as possible at this point in the planning process. It should be understood the EIS analyzes direct, indirect, cumulative, irretrievable and irreversible effects for each Alternative in relationship to each of these significant issue statements. Indicators were assigned to each issue to show the differences among Alternatives.

## ISSUE 1 – RECREATION, ACCESS, AND SCENERY MANAGEMENT

Recreation policies, user preferences, and measurements of quality have changed since the existing Forest Plan was written in 1985 and need to be incorporated into a Revised Forest Plan. The increased recreation demand for and use of the Forest, combined with a wide range of recreation preferences, has led to some contention between recreationists (particularly motorized, i.e., snowmobilers, versus non-motorized, i.e., cross-country skiers). This public contention, coupled with agency responsibilities and directives, has led to increasing discussion and debate over how the Forest lands should be designated for recreation in the Revised Forest Plan.

### GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS<sup>1</sup>

Currently, about forty percent of the Forest is open to cross-country travel. Analysis will consider changing some of the areas to “open on designated routes only.” Currently, the Forest has a policy of “no net gain” in motorized routes. This does not address high route densities in localized areas. The analysis may also consider limits on developing new motorized access routes at a smaller scale than the entire Forest.

### PUBLIC CONCERNS<sup>2</sup>

#### **Maintain/Increase Motorized Access to the Forest**

- Motorized access should remain unchanged because it is suitably functioning.
- Motorized access on R.S. 2477 roads should be maintained, as they are historically significant forest access routes and should be available to the public.
- In view of the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Forest Service should strive to provide access to public lands for challenged citizens (including older Americans) who may be denied recreation opportunities if motorized access is reduced.
- Some/all snowmobile restrictions should be lifted Forest-wide, including the Mt. Naomi area, in response to the increasing popularity of the sport.
- Some/all roadless areas should be managed as semi-primitive motorized, because the “public’s” interest in motorized recreation has increased and the amount of “public” land available for such recreation should be increased proportionately.
- Open road and motorized trail density standards should increase (or, at the very least, stay the same) due to the obvious, increasing public demand for the resource.

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<sup>1</sup> Summarized from 1999 Caribou National Forest, Initial AMS. For a more in depth analysis of the background/current conditions of this issue, see Chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Summarized from public comments, for an explanation of the involvement process, Appendix A.

### **Decrease Motorized Access to the Forest**

- Cross-country motorized travel should be closed and motorized use restricted to designated routes, because off-road vehicles are encroaching on wildlife, causing degradation of habitat and disturbance/disruption of wildlife populations.
- Roadless and recommended wilderness areas should be managed as semi-primitive, non-motorized in order to ensure the utmost protection of wildlife and habitat, as well as to protect the public's right to solitude and primitive recreation experiences.
- Off-road vehicles present noise and air pollution problems in forested areas where recreationists are trying to get away from such urbane problems.
- Motorized trail density should be reduced because off-road vehicle use has not been strictly monitored/enforced in the past and flagrant misuse/abuse of habitat is likely to increase proportionately to the increase in allowed access and use of Forest land.

### **NEEDS FOR CHANGE**

- Establish open road and trail density levels in prescriptions in all Alternatives during Plan revision.
- Evaluate and consider changing some or all of the “areas open to off-road motorized use” to “areas open to designated routes only” through a reasonable range of Alternatives.
- Continue to evaluate travel management options at the site-specific project level described in the 1996 Travel Plan Assessment process paper
- Establish management direction for roadless areas considering the various values associated with roadless areas.

### **INDICATORS**

- A 1 Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) shown in percentage of acres in each class.
- A 2 Estimated acres open to cross-country motorized use during the snow-free season.
- A 3 Motorized and Non-motorized route opportunities.

## **ISSUE 2 – SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

Ecosystem management is an ecological approach to land management used by the Forest Service to achieve the mandate of multiple use. It blends the needs of people and their environmental values with physical and biological elements to maintain diverse, productive, resilient, and sustainable ecosystems. As humans are a part of the ecosystem, their conditions are shaped by it, and in turn, people shape the ecosystem. It is the human aspect of economics, in relation to Forest planning, that is addressed in this issue.

The Zone of Influence for this plan includes nine<sup>3</sup> counties of citizens that have strong historical, emotional, and economic ties to the Forest. The public concerns that pertain to this issue are founded in the debate of how to best meet the economic/social needs of the public, while considering society's environmental values, and responsibly caring for the land. Decisions made in the Forest planning process may result in changes to the economic condition of local communities and may influence regional and national markets.

## GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Livestock grazing, timber production, mineral exploration/development, and recreation activities are key sources of income to communities dependent on Forest resources for the generation of revenue. As alternatives are developed and their effects are analyzed, consideration will be given to concerns such as local community stability, community development patterns, goods and services, employment, current/traditional resource users, and Forest revenue.

## PUBLIC CONCERNS

### **Maintain/Increase the Output of Traditional Forest Commodities (i.e., grazing, timber, and mining)**

- Citizens are concerned that changes in Forest management may result in job and income loss and reductions in the 25% Fund and the Payment-in-Lieu of Taxes (PILT) Fund.
- Recreation oriented employment does not pay as much as logging, mining, and ranching jobs, so the Forest should offer a stable level of products to meet regional demand.
- Long-time residents have economic and social ties to the Forest. For example, local ranchers with traditional water and/or grazing rights, which are necessary for their operation, want to ensure that their lifestyles and customs will be available to future generations.

### **Substitute/Eliminate the Output of Traditional Forest Commodities**

- Facilitate a low level of development, emphasizing recreation, hunting, and fishing in lieu of traditional commodities in order to create viable recreational employment opportunities.
- Scenic and recreational values should be considered as/more important than consumptive commodities.
- The Caribou Forest should be maintained in a natural, unaltered state so that every citizen (including non-locals) can draw comfort and satisfaction from knowing that the National Forest and its resources are being preserved for current and future generations.

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<sup>3</sup> The National Forest System (NFS) lands administered by the Caribou are within eleven counties, and twelve counties lie very close to the Forest. For this analysis, however, the Zone of Influence encompasses nine counties. (See Chapter 3, Issue 2, Socioeconomics.)

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Assess, consider and disclose changes in forest management that may have social and economic effects on Tribes, local, regional, and national entities, and other agencies.
- Assess, consider and disclose changes in forest management that may affect the life-style and cultural tradition of Tribes, area residents, and local communities.

## INDICATORS

- EC 1 Changes in jobs
- EC 2 Changes in incomes
- EC 3 Present Net Value (Financial and Economic Efficiency)

## ISSUE 3 - ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

One of the main distinctions of ecosystem management is the emphasis on retaining and maintaining the functions and processes that keep the natural environment resilient to natural disturbances (i.e., fire, wind-throw, and insect/disease infestation) and human-caused disturbances implemented as vegetation management tools (i.e., prescribed fire, thinning, timber harvest, and grazing).

Public concerns, in conjunction with this issue, stem from the debate over how to viably maintain the health and productivity of the ecosystem with respect to its vegetation structure and composition. This is a difficult issue when combined with the requirement that the Forest Service achieve the mandate of multiple uses, attempting to balance human needs and values with the ecological aspects of the ecosystem. Historically, this has often involved suppression of natural wildfire in an effort to preserve the public's scenic, recreation, and economic values for the Forest.

## GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS

### **Vegetation**

In 1997, the condition of the Forest's ecosystem was assessed using a Properly Functioning Condition (PFC) process developed by the USDA-Forest Service, Intermountain Region. Resource specialists and forest managers used four criteria (species compositions, structure, patterns, and disturbance regimes) to assess ecosystem conditions at a subregional level. The PFC assessment identified four vegetation cover types that are at a high departure from their historic range of variability: Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir, aspen, juniper, and tall forbs.

Forest vegetation atlases from the early 1900s suggest the timbered component on the forest landscape was in an earlier successional state as evidenced by the broad distribution of

quaking aspen, a disturbance-maintained species. Current vegetation mapping indicates that portions of the forest, which were once dominated by aspen, have succeeded to conifer species. This change has modified habitat patterns and vegetation distribution on the landscape. While these changes in vegetation patterns and composition have benefited some wildlife species, in other cases they have been detrimental. Forest management, including road construction, timber harvest, mining, and utility corridors, has fragmented wildlife habitats and displaced wildlife. Some species of wildlife are sensitive to human activities during portions of their life cycles. These human activities, whether intentional or not, can increase stress to wildlife, increase risk of mortality or result in displacement to suboptimal habitat.

- **Aspen** - Approximately 40-50 percent of the aspen acres on the forest have succeeded to other vegetation types and have been lost from historic landscape scale patterns. The loss of aspen is primarily due to the lack of disturbances that favor aspen, conifer succession, and grazing. Neither fire nor previous treatments have maintained historic aspen-dominated acreage at the landscape and larger scale, as the successional path has led to conifer vegetation. In these early seral stands, the tree canopy may consist almost exclusively of aspen for 50 – 150 years until the slower-growing conifers are able to penetrate the aspen canopy (USDA-FS, 1985, pg. 46). As aspen sites succeed to conifer, due to lack of periodic disturbance, the surface soil layer may change to a more acidic layer that favors conifer regeneration and inhibits aspen regeneration. Many aspen stands are currently experiencing conifer succession. A need exists to convert some conifer with an aspen component to early successional status to meet wildlife habitat needs into the future and to reestablish this cover type on the landscape.
- **Conifer** - Approximately 70-80 percent of the conifer component on the Forest exhibits some mature and old structural attributes, suggesting the conifer structural composition is skewed to older age classes. Conversely, a minor component of the conifer on the Forest is in an early seral status. In order to sustain a mosaic of forest structural classes, proposed management would introduce disturbance that would increase the amount of early- and mid- seral stages to improve biological diversity.
- **Rangelands** - Mountain brush habitats are declining due to advanced seral composition and encroachment of juniper. Sagebrush and mountain mahogany are also tending toward late-seral conditions. If allowed to continue, the carrying capacity for wintering big game and nesting habitat for avian species will decrease. Management needs to focus on creating a better balance of early- and mid-seral stages.
- **Noxious Weeds** - Monitoring reports for the Forest describe a growing concern for the spread and effects of noxious weeds as they are out-pacing containment and control efforts.

## **Fire Management**

Historically, approximately two to four percent of the Forest would have burned annually (22,000 to 44,000 acres annually). Past management practices, including fire suppression, have decreased the annually burned Forest area to substantially less than one percent. Fire

suppression has resulted in a variety of problems including: overly dense stands crowded with vegetation that would normally be thinned by natural fire; increased vulnerability of vegetation to insect/disease infestation; and inadequate regeneration of certain species. In addition, increased vegetative fuel loads can cause uncharacteristic wildland fires that can degrade air quality and watershed conditions, as well as threaten public safety and private property.

## **PUBLIC CONCERNS**

### **Maintain/Increase Human-Caused Disturbances for Vegetation Structure/Composition Management**

- Several areas of vegetation are at abnormally high density levels as the result of increasing age and lack of disturbance, which places them in a weakened condition for recovering from disturbances. These areas should be treated to reduce fuel loads. If they are left to wait for natural processes, it is likely that uncharacteristic wildland fire and/or epidemic infestation will affect the ecosystem.
- Catastrophic events result in significant losses of biodiversity and require long recovery periods. Responsible management methods, such as prescribed/natural fire, timber harvest, thinning, and grazing should be used to reduce dangerous fuel loads.
- Old growth timber can be managed in well-distributed patches across the landscape for wildlife habitat, while human-caused disturbances are used to reduce fuels loads in order to protect these stands from “hot” (high intensity) fires.
- Vegetation treatments, such as timber harvest and prescribed fire, should be implemented to remove succeeding subalpine fir and Douglas fir from aspen stands, in order to improve this historically critical wildlife habitat.
- Human-caused management methods should be employed to increase grasses/forbs in the understory and to rejuvenate shrub communities, in order to improve the habitat conditions for wildlife (especially sagebrush-dependent species).

### **Prohibit/Limit Human-Caused Disturbances for Vegetation Structure/Composition Management**

- Forest vegetation structure and composition should not be intensively managed as they are not at dangerously, dense levels.
- All human-caused disturbances should be prohibited because they have negative impacts on the ecosystem. Natural disturbances should be the only Forest management methods allowed.
- Old growth timber should be undisturbed as it is important wildlife habitat.
- Human-caused disturbances can have a variety of impacts on the environment that they are attempting to manage. Prescribed fire is less invasive and should be the only human-caused disturbance used to manage Forest resources.
- Demonstration sites should be devised for experimentation and quantitative monitoring of adaptive vegetation management to determine the most effective and least destructive procedures.

- Timber harvest is a consumptive, invasive management tool that should only be implemented in areas of disease/insect infestation or heavy wind-throw for the purpose of circumventing the initiation or perpetuation of insect and/or disease problems.
- Grazing should be limited and regulations strictly enforced as overuse leads to reductions in native vegetation species and increases in non-native or undesirable species (i.e., noxious weeds).

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Develop or improve management direction for desired vegetation structure, composition, disturbance, and patterns for each cover type that could include restoring more natural fire regimes through prescribed burning or allowing fires to burn under appropriate conditions, harvest, or thinning of dense stands to reduce ladder fuels
- Develop management direction for soil restoration, reclamation, and protection to maintain soil quality, productivity, hydrologic function, and watershed condition
- Develop improved multi-program goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring for the prevention, containment, and control of noxious weeds.
- Develop improved multi-program goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring to integrate managed fire into Forest-wide desired conditions and to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic fires.
- Develop goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring requirements for air quality and smoke management
- Develop direction to restore vegetation health in the wildland/urban interface, such as the lands surrounding Pocatello, to reduce the risk of catastrophic events to landowners.
- Bring all eight Research Natural Areas (RNAs) under consistent management direction, including the use of prescribed fire and naturally occurring fire to maintain the objectives of RNAs where appropriate.
- Develop guidelines for the removal of undesirable noxious or invasive plant or animal life from wild and scenic rivers, recommended wilderness and other unique ecosystems.

## INDICATORS

- EM 1 Insect hazard rating—a relative rating with a range of low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, or high.
- EM 2 Wildfire hazard rating for forested and non-forested vegetation using a relative rating with a range of low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, or high.

- EM 3 Fire condition class – a relative rating of the potential for uncharacteristically large wildfires with a range of low, low-moderate, moderate, moderate-high, and high
- EM 4 Percent of conifer and aspen acres in mature and old condition class in Year 100.
- EM 5 Percent of conifer and aspen acres in mature and old condition class in Year 10.
- EM 6 Number of decades to reach the desired range of future conditions by forested vegetation type.
- EM 7 Percent of non-forested acres in greater than fifteen percent canopy cover density condition class in year 10 and long-term compared to historic range of variability (HRV).
- EM 8 Number of decades to reach the historic range of variability in non-forested vegetation types.

## **ISSUE 4 - LIVESTOCK GRAZING**

Grazing of public lands is an issue that has increased in complexity as the lifestyles, and subsequently, the interests of society have evolved. There has been an increase in concern for the health and productivity of Forest habitats, and some may consider these concerns to be more important than historic commodity driven goals (such as grazing). However, grazing permits play a traditional and vital role in local agriculture. Many local operations rely on forage produced on public lands to meet a portion of their yearly grazing needs. Forest management direction affects rangeland resources and the level of livestock grazing authorized under permit.

### **GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS**

The 1985 Forest Plan identified approximately 700,000 Forest acres as capable of supporting livestock grazing. However, the Forest Service and the public have determined that a suitability analysis for livestock grazing should be completed at the Forest-wide scale. Actual average livestock use levels, defined in animal unit months per year (AUM/yr), are lower than originally anticipated in the current Forest Plan. Contributing factors to this downward trend include; increased importance of National Forest fish and wildlife habitats; increased livestock operator costs due to mitigation measures identified to protect these habitats; changing economics of grazing livestock; and increased varieties and use of recreation opportunities.

## PUBLIC CONCERNS

### **Maintain Livestock Grazing on the Forest**

- Livestock grazing is a necessary economic factor for many residents within the Forest zone of influence. Their livelihood will be directly and significantly affected if grazing privileges are diminished or rescinded.
- Grazing is a historical factor for many members of the local community whose quality of life and lifestyle, will be negatively affected if grazing privileges are diminished or rescinded.
- Livestock grazing can be an effective tool to manage vegetation and improve resource conditions to meet a variety of management objectives.

### **Eliminate or Limit Livestock Grazing on the Forest**

- Livestock grazing on public lands should be prohibited because of significant damage to upland, riparian, and aquatic resources that result from the practice.
- Livestock grazing should be prohibited on national forest lands due to the negative impacts it has on recreation sites and experiences. At the very least, livestock should not be permitted on or near developed recreational facilities or undeveloped sites that are heavily used.
- Livestock grazing removes vegetation from, and encroaches on, the habitat of native Forest species.
- If use is continued, impacts from grazing should be reduced by setting, monitoring, and enforcing Forest-wide standards and guidelines for forage utilization/stubble height, percent use of woody species, soil compaction, and stream bank damage.
- The Revised Forest Plan should delineate areas where livestock grazing is allowed and not allowed based on a set of objective land capability and suitability criteria.

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Evaluate rangeland capability information and reassess areas suitable for livestock grazing through the application of prescriptions in a range of Alternatives.
- Develop standards and guidelines, including forage utilization for native range and seedings, to protect vegetation diversity and structure, soil productivity, fish and wildlife needs, and ecosystem processes, especially watershed functions.
- Develop and implement protocols for monitoring grazing standards on the Forest.

## INDICATORS

- LG 1 Estimated suitable rangeland acres on the Forest.
- LG 2 Potential forage production on suitable range.

LG 3 Change in actual use based on current management.

LG 4 Upland vegetation response to grazing.

## **ISSUE 5 – MINERALS OPERATIONS, RECLAMATION, AND HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES MANAGEMENT**

Phosphate is by far the largest mineral resource currently being mined on the Forest. There are five Known Phosphate Leasing Areas (KPLAs) that lie, at least partially, within the Forest boundaries. There is also potential for productive oil/gas wells although no lease applications have been issued or are pending. Mining of locatable minerals such as gold, perlite or pumice occurs, though use of these resources is not expected to be high (FEIS, Chapter 3: Issue 5).

Issues concerning mining have changed since the Forest Plan was originally composed and these variations have prompted a concern and need for new directives in the Revised Forest Plan. Some of the changes are: a public desire for, and emphasis on, more natural appearing reclaimed landscapes; the discovery that selenium and possibly other hazardous substances are leaching from phosphate mines; and the fact that regulations concerning the leasing of National Forest lands for oil and gas development have changed. The Revision will not address oil and gas leasing, this would be analyzed in a separate environmental analysis, when needed.

### **GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS**

Reclamation activities occur on mining sites, mine waste dumps, and haul roads. Past reclamation efforts have not focused on the establishment of native plant species and their associated communities and structure. Current reclamation activities on mine sites require topsoil stripping, which is then directly replaced rather than stockpiled, if possible. Native plant species are now being used for reclamation where they will accomplish the objectives. Some of the reclaimed sites have experienced instability in the form of slumps and debris flows (sometimes causing sedimentation in waterways). In 1996, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management became aware that phosphate mining-related disturbances might be releasing selenium into the ecosystem at unacceptable levels. Preliminary data from a comprehensive study conducted in 1998 indicated elevated selenium levels could be a major issue that will require a concerted effort on the part of federal/state agencies, research, and mining industry experts to resolve.

### **PUBLIC CONCERNS**

#### **Maintain Current Mining Standards and Management Directions**

- Public lands have traditionally been used for mining activity and current standards and management directions are adequate.

### **Revise Current Mining Standards and Management Directions**

- Additional standards/guidelines must be developed, implemented, and enforced in order to significantly minimize or eliminate the potential release of hazardous substances (including selenium) from mining activities.
- The scenic/recreational qualities, other public uses and biodiversity of a given habitat should be deemed highly valuable and therefore sought after, and provided for, in reclamation efforts.
- Stricter standards/guidelines should ensure effective topsoil management, use of native plant species, construction of more natural appearing landscapes, as well as the use of Best Management Practices.
- Monitoring and enforcement are essential to ensure that new standards/guidelines are effectively met, in order to circumvent the continuance of hazardous and detrimental practices.

### **NEEDS FOR CHANGE**

- Develop improved goals, objectives, standards and guidelines to address reclamation of lands after phosphate mining, including the use of native plants, the use of resident topsoil, and the restoration of a more natural appearing landscape in reclamation efforts.
- Incorporate new Best Management Practices (BMPs) or other new information as it is developed or becomes available to address selenium releases into the environment.

### **INDICATORS**

No comprehensive issue indicators exist for this issue. However, the direction of mineral reclamation is either from a prescriptive or an adaptive management approach (FEIS, Chapter 4, Issue 5).

## **ISSUE 6 - RIPARIAN/WETLAND AREAS AND AQUATIC BIOTA**

Riparian areas include banks and adjacent areas of water bodies that have considerably moister soils than contiguous floodplains and uplands. Wetlands have more available water for longer periods of time than riparian areas, making them only slightly different. These areas are vital because they provide specialized wildlife habitat and their localized vegetation notably contributes to stream bank and floodplain stability as well as water temperature and quality.

### **GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS**

Approximately ten percent of the Forest's riparian areas are considered to be functioning improperly and about thirty-five percent of the Forest's streams are considered moderately at

risk. The State of Idaho, through the Environmental Protection Agency, under section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, has identified twenty-one waterbodies within the Forest that may not fully meet their designated beneficial uses. Improved management direction is needed to maintain or restore riparian vegetation, channel stability/function, and aquatic resources.

Yellowstone and Bonneville cutthroat trout, Forest Service Sensitive species have been inventoried on the Caribou side of the Forest between 2000 and 2002. Of the 51 sixth code Hydrologic Units in which Yellowstone cutthroat trout were expected to occupy, 67 percent had strong populations, 27 percent had depressed populations, and 6 percent had no Yellowstone cutthroat trout. Of the 35 sixth code Hydrologic Units in which Bonneville cutthroat trout were expected to occupy, 17 percent had strong populations, 43 percent were depressed, and 40 percent had no Bonneville cutthroat trout.

## PUBLIC CONCERNS

### **Emphasize Multiple-Use for Management of Riparian Areas**

- Riparian areas are historically significant for recreational, grazing, mining and varied uses demanded by the public and should be managed with multiple-use directives in order to meet societal demands.

### **Emphasize Restoration and Protection for Management of Riparian Areas**

- Restoration should be emphasized in order to promote function of riparian areas to meet state and federal standards for clean water.
- It is vital to retain the integrity of riparian areas as they provide significant physical, biological, and chemical attributes that directly influence the quantity and quality of water and aquatic biota.
- Sufficient habitat conditions must be maintained in order to sustain viable populations of wildlife and fish species, such as the Bonneville and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.
- Minimally disturbed areas (i.e. roadless areas) should be conserved as strongholds for riparian values, aquatic habitat, and clean water.

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Develop goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring strategies for riparian and aquatic management.
- Develop appropriate desired future conditions that reflect the inherent diversity and capability of the Forest's riparian and aquatic ecosystems and fully support the designated beneficial uses of the water in accordance with State Water Quality Standards and the Clean Water Act.
- Develop management direction that emphasizes native fish habitat protection and population viability.
- Develop or improve management direction for Sensitive Species and species listed under the Endangered Species Act.

- Maintain or enhance the “outstandingly remarkable” ecological value of Elk Valley Marsh and the “outstandingly remarkable” fisheries value for St. Charles Creek by incorporating appropriate management direction in the Revised Forest Plan.

#### INDICATORS

- R 1 Watershed integrity as defined in the Inland West Watershed Initiative (IWWI) and measured by percent of watersheds disturbed by alternative.
- R 2 Riparian condition measured as relative protection by alternative.
- R 3 Water quality measured as relative protection by alternative.
- R 4 Fish population viability based on probability of persistence over the long term, using a rating of “low persistence,” “moderate persistence,” or “high persistence.”

#### ISSUE 7 - TIMBER SALE PROGRAM

The National Forest Management Act directs the Forest Service to program timber harvest on a non-declining yield basis. This means the timber sales offered should not exceed the quantity which the Forest is capable of naturally producing on a sustained-yield basis. Three Idaho mills currently purchase commercial wood products from the Caribou National Forest: Stoddard Lumber Company in St. Anthony, Yellowstone Log Homes in Rigby; and Jensen Lumber Company in Ovid. Two other commercial buyers, Mountain Valley Timber Co. and Louisiana Pacific Corporation, have been active recently in purchasing timber from the Forest. Demand for commercial wood products, including sawtimber, remains at eleven million board feet (MMBF) a year.

#### GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Approximately 550,000 acres of the Forest support forestland. (This excludes about 10,200 acres of lands where forested vegetation species are gradually encroaching into shrub habitats.) The Forest provides a variety of wood and miscellaneous products (sawtimber, house logs, chips, firewood, Christmas trees, posts and poles). These products supply commodities to the public, provide revenue to the government, and generate income and jobs for local and regional economies.

## PUBLIC CONCERNS

### **Maintain a Supply and Demand Level of Timber Harvest**

- Several community members rely on the traditional availability of fuel wood as an economically necessary heating method.
- It is important to maintain sustainable sawtimber harvests, as economies are dependent on the supply. Three mills operate within the area, and two other commercial buyers are active in purchasing timber from the Forest. Demand, including sawtimber, is at least eleven million board feet per year.
- Timber harvest is an effective vegetation management tool for: controlling conifer encroachment in aspen stands; wildland fire, fuels reduction; and salvage of windfall or infested timber for the purpose of circumventing the initiation or perpetuation of detrimental insect and/or disease infestations.

### **Restrict/Prohibit Timber Harvest**

- Timber harvest can have serious/detrimental effects on aquatic, terrestrial, and hydrologic integrities. Thus, it should be prohibited until the suitability of an area is determined. Then harvest should be restricted to (and enforced for) sustainable levels, and mitigations (as well as Best Management Practices) should be developed and enforced in order to effectively protect aquatic, terrestrial, and hydrologic integrities.
- Timber harvest should be prohibited or severely restricted in roadless areas in order to retain healthy natural habitats as well as the scenic qualities that primitive recreationists seek.
- All harvest activities should be prohibited in watersheds that contain water quality limited streams in an effort to restore/rehabilitate these areas that were probably compromised in the first place by human-caused disturbances.

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Reassess timberland suitability and develop direction for management of suitable acres for ecological and multiple use purposes.
- Develop or improve management direction for desired vegetation structure, composition, disturbance, and patterns for each cover type.

## INDICATORS

- T 1 Allowable Sale Quantity: The maximum quantity of timber that may be sold from the area of suitable land covered by the Forest Plan for the first decade. The ASQ volume calculated is the amount of timber that is available on a continuous or sustainable basis from the suited timberland based on the current conditions of suited timberland acres and timber inventory.
- T 2 Total Sale Program Quantity: The total amount of timber and other wood products that could be produced by each Alternative for the first decade. This indicator

includes all of the ASQ volume and an additional volume of wood products (fuelwood, post, poles) that may come from both suited and unsuited timberlands.

- T 3 Acres harvested (Decade total).
- T 4 Suitable acres.
- T 5 Acres of suitable timber in Roadless Areas
- T 6 Estimated total miles of road construction and reconstruction.

## ISSUE 8 - ROADLESS AREA MANAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

The Forest Service can recommend areas for wilderness through the forest plan process, but only Congress, through the legislative process, can determine areas for inclusion into the Wilderness Preservation System. Congress also has the authority to change USFS recommended wilderness boundaries. Although Idaho has approximately 4,006,000 acres of designated wilderness, none of those areas lie within the Caribou National Forest. The current Forest Plan recommended a 14,600-acre section of the Mt. Naomi Roadless Area and a 16,000-acre section of the Worm Creek Roadless Area to Congress, in 1985, for wilderness designations; to date, Congress has not acted on these recommendations. Public concern for wilderness and roadless areas appears to stem from a desire for additional designations versus concerns about the implications these designations may have on Forest access.

### GENERAL RESOURCE CONDITIONS

Over 70 percent of the Caribou is within an Inventoried Roadless Area (IRA). Thirty-four IRAs encompass over 700,000 acres. Several of these IRAs have been entered for timber harvest, mining, and road building since the 1985 Plan was signed. The AMS proposed to carry the 1985 Forest Plan wilderness recommendations for the Mt. Naomi and Worm Creek roadless areas forward as a component of all Revised Forest Plan alternatives.

### PUBLIC CONCERNS

#### **Decrease Wilderness Recommendations and Maintain/Increase Motorized Access in Roadless Areas**

- There are several thousand acres of wilderness acreage in Idaho and surrounding states. There is no need to limit multiple-use opportunities on the Caribou by designating additional wilderness.
- Wilderness designation decreases motorized access to the Forest and limits recreational opportunities, especially for disabled Americans, and negatively impacts important traditional and/or economic resource use.
- Roadless areas should not be increased nor should semi-primitive, non-motorized prescriptions. There is a substantial demand for recreation as well as managed

resource use that requires motorized vehicles. The public's recreation and resource needs should be balanced with environmental needs not subjugated to them.

#### **Increase Wilderness Recommendations and Decrease Motorized Access in Roadless Areas**

- All thirty-four roadless areas, or at least those with high wilderness capability and availability, should be recommended for wilderness designations.
- Roadless areas not recommended for wilderness designation should be managed as semi-primitive, non-motorized in order to retain healthy natural habitats as well as the scenic qualities that primitive recreationists seek.
- Roadless areas not recommended for wilderness designation should (at the very least) be managed as semi-primitive, motorized.

#### **NEEDS FOR CHANGE**

- Re-evaluate the Forest's thirty-four inventoried roadless areas for possible Wilderness recommendation.
- Establish management direction for roadless areas considering the various values associated with roadless areas.

#### **INDICATORS**

RA 1 Acres in management prescription categories 1, 2, and 3.

RA 2 Projected acres harvested in Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs).

WD 1 Acres recommended to Congress for inclusion in the Wilderness Preservation System.

WD 2 Non-motorized opportunity within recommended Wilderness.

WD 3 Motorized opportunity within recommended Wilderness.

### **ISSUE 9 – WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT**

A variety of diverse habitats exist for approximately 334 species of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife known or suspected to occur on the Forest. These habitats provide cover, forage, water, and reproductive sites for these species. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulations require National Forests to provide habitat in order "to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area." Public concern regarding this issue is in relation to the various potentials for wildlife habitats to be altered by management directions made in the Forest planning process.

### **Rangelands**

A wide variety of wildlife species rely on rangeland cover types including native grouse, raptors, small mammals, migratory birds, and big game. The cumulative impact of domestic livestock grazing and big game foraging has the potential to adversely affect vegetation and watershed conditions and /or degrade big game winter range. In addition to the increase of elk populations, and the subsequent pioneering of new winter range, the recent construction of new homes and developments have displaced big game from traditional, privately owned, winter range. Thus, the wildlife habitat value of the remaining winter range, public and private, has increased.

Lack of fire has caused a trend to late seral overstories and grazing has generally maintained understories in early to mid-seral stages (Planning File, Livestock Grazing). Past seedings for forage improvement for livestock grazing have changed at least 63,000 acres to partially, non-native understories that include introduced grass species such as crested wheatgrass, bulbous bluegrass, Kentucky bluegrass and smooth brome (Planning File, Livestock Grazing).

### **Riparian Habitats**

About eighty-three percent of wildlife species (85 percent of which are birds) on the Caribou National Forest are dependent on riparian areas. There is a decline in amphibian species, which locally mirrors observed declines in portions of the Rocky Mountain region. The factors that are contributing to these declines are unknown at this time. However, approximately 10 percent of the Forest's riparian areas are functioning improperly and 35 percent are moderately at risk.

### **Forested Habitats**

There are eight sensitive species associated with forested habitats that may be present on the Caribou. In general, the increase of motorized access into the remote areas of the Forest is impacting wildlife security. As with other forested areas in the West, timber stands are trending toward older age classes. To improve overall habitat diversity, management actions should focus on increasing the amount of early and mid-seral stands of forested vegetation.

### **Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Wildlife/Plant Species**

The Forest contains potential habitat for the federally listed, Threatened, Ute ladies'-tresses. If it is found, measures would need to be taken to meet Endangered Species Act obligations.

The Forest contains habitat for several Forest Service Sensitive species: four plants associated with rangeland communities; two animal species associated with rangeland communities; eight animal species associated with forested communities; and five animal species are associated with riparian/wetland/aquatic communities. There are also five listed Threatened or Endangered species known or suspected to be on the Forest. (FEIS, Chapter 3: Wildlife Habitat.)

## PUBLIC CONCERNS

### **Maintain Current Wildlife Habitat Management Efforts**

- The Forest is adequately balancing the habitat needs of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species with multiple-use directives.
- The Forest is adequately balancing the habitat needs of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species with societal demands for public resources on the Caribou National Forest.

### **Increase/Revise Wildlife Habitat Management Efforts**

- Summer and winter big game habitats should be protected and managed to provide for huntable populations of these species.
- Motorized activities such as timber harvest, road building, OHV use, and mining adversely impact species populations and management directions should be implemented to decrease their use and impacts.
- Protective measures should be implemented, monitored, and enforced to manage habitats in order to rehabilitate/maintain viable populations of federally listed and or sensitive species.
- Habitat sanctuary preserves, core reserves, and biological corridors should be established in order to protect wildlife populations from current multiple-use activities.

## NEEDS FOR CHANGE

- Develop management direction to maintain a percentage of old growth on an area of land base in the Revised Forest Plan.
- Develop management direction for increasingly important habitats, such as winter range, to maintain habitat vegetation and watershed values.
- Develop standards and guidelines for riparian and wetland areas to meet the requirements of wildlife species associated with these unique and valuable habitats.
- Develop management direction, including monitoring of habitat trends, to conserve or restore key wildlife, fish, and rare plant habitats, including those species federally listed under the Endangered Species Act, species identified as Sensitive by the Regional Forester, and species identified as rare or scarce.
- Develop management direction for Sensitive Species and species needing extra consideration to ensure the Forest contributes to the maintenance of viable populations and to ensure these populations do not trend towards listing under the Endangered Species Act.
- Develop management direction to address habitat loss from disturbance, succession, or human encroachment and its replacement through succession or active management.
- Develop management direction to maintain or improve habitat connectivity and manage terrestrial and aquatic habitats, including habitats for broad-ranging species such as deer, elk, wolverine and lynx.

## INDICATORS

- WL 1 Viability analysis based on wildlife habitat outcomes (and population data where available) for each Alternative. Viability analysis will incorporate “guilds” or “suites” of species that use or need similar habitat conditions. Viability is expressed in “low risk” and “moderate risk” terms. “Low risk” means the Alternative provides a high likelihood of species persistence. A “moderate risk” means the Alternative provides a moderate likelihood of species persistence.
- Forest vegetation associated species
  - Rangeland vegetation associated species
  - Riparian vegetation associated species
- WL 2 Determine how habitats contribute toward state game population management goals and objectives using qualitative “meets” and “does not meet” ratings.
- Summer habitat effectiveness
  - Hunting season vulnerability
  - Acres managed for winter range