

Caribou - Targhee National Forest Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Section 1—Introduction

Abstract

The Targhee has been implementing the 1997 Revised Forest Plan (RFP) for over seven years. This report describes how the forest resources are meeting or moving towards desired conditions, goals, and objectives. It is also a summary and synthesis of annual monitoring findings. The Report is separated into four sections: Introduction, Accomplishment of Goals and Objectives, Monitoring Results and Evaluation, and Summary. These sections will be posted on the website separately at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/>.

Based on the information in this Report, the Forest has identified changes needed in the Targhee RFP. Monitoring identified several areas that need to be addressed, but overall, RFP standards and guidelines are effective and helping to accomplish the resource objectives. In the next two years, the Forest plans to amend the RFP to update the Monitoring Plan, standards and guidelines, and management indicator species. These updates to management direction in response to monitoring should extend the life of the Plan and minimize the need for revision in the future. In addition, through the remainder of the life of the RFP, the Forest will:

- accelerate efforts to reduce hazardous fuels through a variety of treatment methods, particularly in and near interface communities.*
- increase forested and non-forested vegetation management to move toward more diverse conditions.*
- continue efforts to enforce the Travel Plan and create a network of roads and trails for all users.*
- foster more partnerships to further enhance natural resources on the Forest.*

Introduction

Because the Caribou and Targhee were combined into one Forest recently, they operate under different Management and Monitoring Plans and are evaluated separately. This report is only for the Targhee portion of the Forest. The Caribou Monitoring and Evaluation Report, 2002-2003 is available on our website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/>.

The Revised Forest Plan for the Targhee National Forest (RFP) was approved on April 15, 1997 when Regional Forester, Dale Bosworth, signed the Record of Decision. The actual time period covered by this Monitoring and Evaluation Report is the first seven years of Forest Plan implementation. One of the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) is to monitor and evaluate implementation of the Forest Plan. According to regulations at 36 CFR Part 219, monitoring should determine:

- If conditions or demands in the area covered by the Forest Plan have changed significantly enough to require any revision to the Plan (36 CFR 219.10(g))
- If budgets have significantly changed the long-term relationships between levels of multiple use goods and services enough to create the need for a “significant amendment” (36 CFR 219.10(e))
- How well the stated objectives of the Forest Plan have been met (CFR 36 219.12(k))
- How closely management Standards and Guidelines have been followed (36 CFR 219.12(k))
- Compliance with NFMA standards for restocking, timber suitability, size limits for harvest areas, and insect and disease activity following management (36 CFR 219.12(k)).

The Monitoring and Evaluation Plan in the Targhee RFP was designed to meet NFMA requirements. The results of annual monitoring activities have been evaluated to verify the propriety of current actions, standards, and guidelines and to determine if any changes are needed. In addition to monitoring, the RFP identifies goals and objectives for forest management. Goals describe desired conditions for the future; they are typically general, with no specific timeframe for achievement. In forest planning, one way to track goal achievements is through the measurement of objectives. An objective is a quantifiable statement of achievement expected within a determined time frame. In this Monitoring and Evaluation Report, we have measured our progress toward meeting those objectives and some of the goals in the Targhee RFP. Not all goals are tracked, because some are too general and vague to measure; however, we have provided a general overview of how each program area is meeting the goals in the RFP.

In addition to the NFMA regulations for a five-year review, the Washington Office has instructed that we evaluate the following aspects of the RFP direction (Appeal Decision, May 2002):

- Habitat for species associated with late seral forests
- Habitat for species associated with sagebrush/grasslands
- Level of prescribed fire use for maintenance of diversity
- Habitat data and current species population information
- Timber age class distribution.

This information is evaluated at the end of the report in the summary. The data to support the evaluation is displayed in the program summaries, objective accomplishments, or individual monitoring item sections. For example, the “habitat data and current species population information” is displayed in the discussion of individual monitoring items. The level of prescribed fire use data is displayed in the accomplishment of goals and objectives. Then, this information is synthesized and evaluated in the summary section of the report.

This review and evaluation of direction and monitoring is integral to the adaptive management principles upon which the Targhee RFP is premised. Adaptive management provides the flexibility for ongoing learning which implies that successful ecosystem management depends on learning about the system while managing it. The final section of this report is a summary of the findings and our planned actions. It provides a “big picture” view of how Forest resources are changing (or not) under the direction in the RFP and what we intend to change.

Forest Supervisor's Message

Since the Targhee RFP was signed in 1997, the Forest has been working towards meeting the goals and objectives developed in agreement with the public. Many of these goals were controversial but necessary to improve forest and rangeland resources for future generations. Our ecosystem approach to management integrates ecological, economic, and social factors to maintain and enhance the quality of the environment to meet these needs. This report details our activities and monitoring we have been doing to insure that the Targhee is managed to meet the overall goal that ecosystems are "dynamic and resilient to disturbances to structure, composition, and processes at appropriate landscape scales" (RFP, III-5).

The Targhee RFP shifted the focus of management from outputs to outcomes. Across the Forest, our timber harvest is focused on achieving healthy landscape conditions rather than "getting the cut out". The Targhee RFP places emphasis on maintaining and improving wildlife habitat, particularly for species associated with mature forested landscapes. Access management is another major component of the RFP, which establishes motorized route density standards to help achieve resource objectives. To insure the health of aquatic ecosystems on the Forest, the RFP has a management prescription solely for these important areas. The Aquatic Influence Zone prescription contains guidance to move riparian areas towards more healthy, sustainable conditions. In the RFP we made decisions to manage for a variety of human uses of the Forest. Recreation and access management is a continuing challenge for the Forest.

After seven years of implementing and monitoring, what have we learned?

When the RFP was signed, four wildlife species were listed as threatened or endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. In 2000, the Canada lynx was listed as threatened. Management activities have focused on aiding recovery of these species. For instance, in 1998 about 384 miles of roads were decommissioned to provide secure grizzly bear habitat. At the time of this Report, one of these species, the peregrine falcon, has been delisted and the others are on the verge of delisting.

Peregrine falcon

One of the reclassification objectives of the Recovery Plan was to have a minimum of seventeen breeding pairs in Idaho, producing an average of 1.25 young each year. In 2004, twenty-six occupied territories were documented in Idaho, producing an average of 1.6 young per occupied territory and 2.3 young per successful territory (Sallebanks 2004). In 2004, the number of occupied territories, number of young per occupied territory, and number of young per successful territory were the highest recorded in the state of Idaho since 1985. In the past two decades, the number of occupied territories on and adjacent to the Forest has grown from one to a high of ten in 2000. In the spring of 2000, the peregrine falcon was removed from the Endangered Species List.

Bald eagle

According to the Pacific States Recovery Plan, the habitat management goal for the portion of the Greater Yellowstone zone that includes the Targhee NF is to have twenty-three nesting territories; this goal was met in 1988. The population has continued to increase, and in 2002, approximately fifty-four nesting territories were documented in this area. Out of the fifty-four nesting territories, twenty have nest sites on the Forest, and another eleven have a portion of the territory on the Forest.

Gray wolf

The Targhee is part of the Central Idaho and Greater Yellowstone Experimental Nonessential Population areas. At the end of 2004, there were 40 identified wolf packs, 30 breeding pairs, and a minimum fall wolf population of 324 wolves in the Greater Yellowstone Population Area. One established wolf pack, the Bechler pack, was using the Forest. At the end of 2004, there were 50 identified wolf packs, 30 breeding pairs, and a minimum fall wolf population of 452 wolves in the Central Idaho Population area. Since wolf reintroduction, no wolf mortality has occurred on the Forest as a result of management activity. No packs have been established on the Forest but wolf activity has been confirmed for the past several years.

Grizzly bear

The grizzly bear has met or exceeded all of the recovery goals identified in the Recovery Plan. In 2003, the Conservation Strategy was finalized in preparation for delisting the bear. The Targhee RFP is currently being amended through the "Six Forest Grizzly Bear Habitat Amendment" to incorporate direction from the Conservation Strategy that is not already included in the RFP. Distribution of grizzly bears is expanding south along the Teton and west along the Centennial Mountain ranges. Since the RFP was signed, the Bechler-Teton BMU has been occupied

every year and Henry's Lake and Plateau BMU's have been occupied 5 and 4 out of past 6 years (resp.). No bears have been killed as a result of livestock interactions on the TNF. Domestic sheep are being moved to allotments outside the Recovery Area and only two sheep allotments remain active within the Targhee portion of the recovery area. With the decommissioning of about 384 miles of road in 1998, all BMUs are meeting road density standards.

While the RFP has a considerable amount of direction for the above species, it also insures habitat protection and enhancement for a host of other species. The RFP directs maintenance of security areas and reducing road densities to provide higher quality habitat for big game species. Across the forest, most wildlife managers agree that elk numbers are at all time highs and Idaho Fish and Game has issued permits to reduce populations in some areas. The Forest continues efforts to enhance habitat for trumpeter swans. Several ponds on the Forest provide nesting habitat for these sensitive species. Targhee biologists have participated in Canada lynx monitoring for the past five years. In addition to the national survey methods, we have developed partnerships with researchers to measure and monitor potential lynx habitat and their prey base.

One of the emphasis items of the RFP is to maintain and enhance habitat for native trout on the Forest. The Targhee has established partnerships with other agencies and a myriad of private organizations to enhance Yellowstone cutthroat trout (YCT) habitat. All of the major streams on the Forest have been surveyed for the presence and condition of native cutthroat. These surveys have identified opportunities for enhancement which are prioritized for action. Several fish weirs have been constructed to restrict non-native trout from migrating upstream into YCT stronghold streams. Other projects such as the Thurman Creek reintroduction project and Garden Creek watershed improvement project have directly improved habitat for this sensitive fish species.

One of the most controversial elements of the RFP was to eliminate cross-country motorized travel from 93 percent of the Forest. The RFP also established motorized route densities for each prescription area which led to additional restrictions on motorized use. So far, over 500 miles of roads have been decommissioned to insure the closures are effective. As we look back on the past seven years, even the motorized user groups support the steps we took to begin managing motorized recreation. We continue to upgrade trails to create a balanced network for motorized use. We have also increased efforts to educate the public and enforce the Travel Plan. We are working cooperatively with Idaho Fish and Game and Wyoming Game and Fish to patrol the Forest during hunting seasons in priority locations. Of course, Forest personnel cannot be everywhere and monitoring shows that illegal motorized use is occurring throughout the Forest. In the face of declining budgets, we will continue to foster partnerships to assist us in the tasks of enforcement and education.

The Forest has turned a corner on forest and rangeland management. Timber harvest and prescribed burns focus now on restoring ecosystem functions, not on producing board feet or forage for livestock. While both of those are legitimate uses and within the Mission of the Forest Service, they are not emphasis items. Instead, treatments will continue to focus on ecological restoration and fuel hazard reductions. Historical maps indicate that at the beginning of the 20th century, aspen dominated over 20 percent of the forested acres on the Targhee. As we enter the 21st century, less than 6 percent of the Forest is dominated by aspen and many of those acres are barely holding on. To address this issue, we have used commercial timber harvest, prescribed burning, and hand felling to restore and regenerate aspen on the Forest. Many of our conifer forests are outside of their natural fire regime and in need of treatment to reduce fuel build-ups. In response to this, we are focusing fuel reduction projects in the urban interface areas such as Island Park and Palisades summer home area. In more remote areas of the Forest we have developed a Guidebook so that we can use wildland fire to meet management goals. These efforts have been successful and in the future we will accelerate these activities.

Invasive, or non-native, aggressive, species are also a threat to forest ecosystem sustainability. Cooperative Weed Management Groups, comprised of private, state and federal resource managers, cover the entire Forest. Rangeland managers use a variety of control methods to combat this threat to our resources including hand-treatment, biological control, and chemicals.

While we have been implementing the RFP, many of these same issues have become nationally recognized. In 2000, the National Fire Plan was developed to focus land managers on reducing wildland fire hazards, particularly in and around communities surrounding public lands. The Forest Service developed the Recreation Agenda to improve outdoor recreation settings, visitor satisfaction with facilities and services, and educational opportunities, among other things. The Healthy Forest Initiative and Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 were developed to direct funding and resources at maintaining the health and sustainability of forested landscapes. The Roadless Area Conservation Rule insures that forest managers are considering the value of Inventoried Roadless Areas prior to management activities. In 2003 the Chief of the Forest Service outlined the four biggest threats that forest managers should deal with. All four of these—fire hazard and fuel build-up, unmanaged recreation, invasive species, and habitat fragmentation from loss of open space—are issues that the Targhee RFP addressed

in 1997. Throughout this Report, you will see details on how we are managing the Forest in accord with these, and many other, national agendas.

Based on the information in this Report, we have identified changes we need to make in the Targhee RFP. We have also identified potential amendments to the Targhee RFP. In the next two years, we plan to amend the RFP to update the Monitoring Plan, standards and guidelines, and management indicator species. These updates to management direction in response to monitoring should extend the life of the Plan and minimize the need for revision in the future.

Through the remainder of the life of the Targhee RFP, we will:

- accelerate efforts to reduce hazardous fuels through a variety of treatment methods, particularly in and near interface communities
- increase forested and non-forested vegetation management to move toward more diverse conditions
- continue efforts to enforce the Travel Plan and create a network of roads and trails for all users
- foster more partnerships to further enhance natural resources on the Forest

We appreciate your continuing interest in management of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. I encourage you all to remain or become involved in our projects and activities.

Jerry B. Reese

JERRY B. REESE

Former Caribou – Targhee National Forest Supervisor (Retired July 1, 2005)

Larry Timchak

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Map 1 Targhee Zone of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

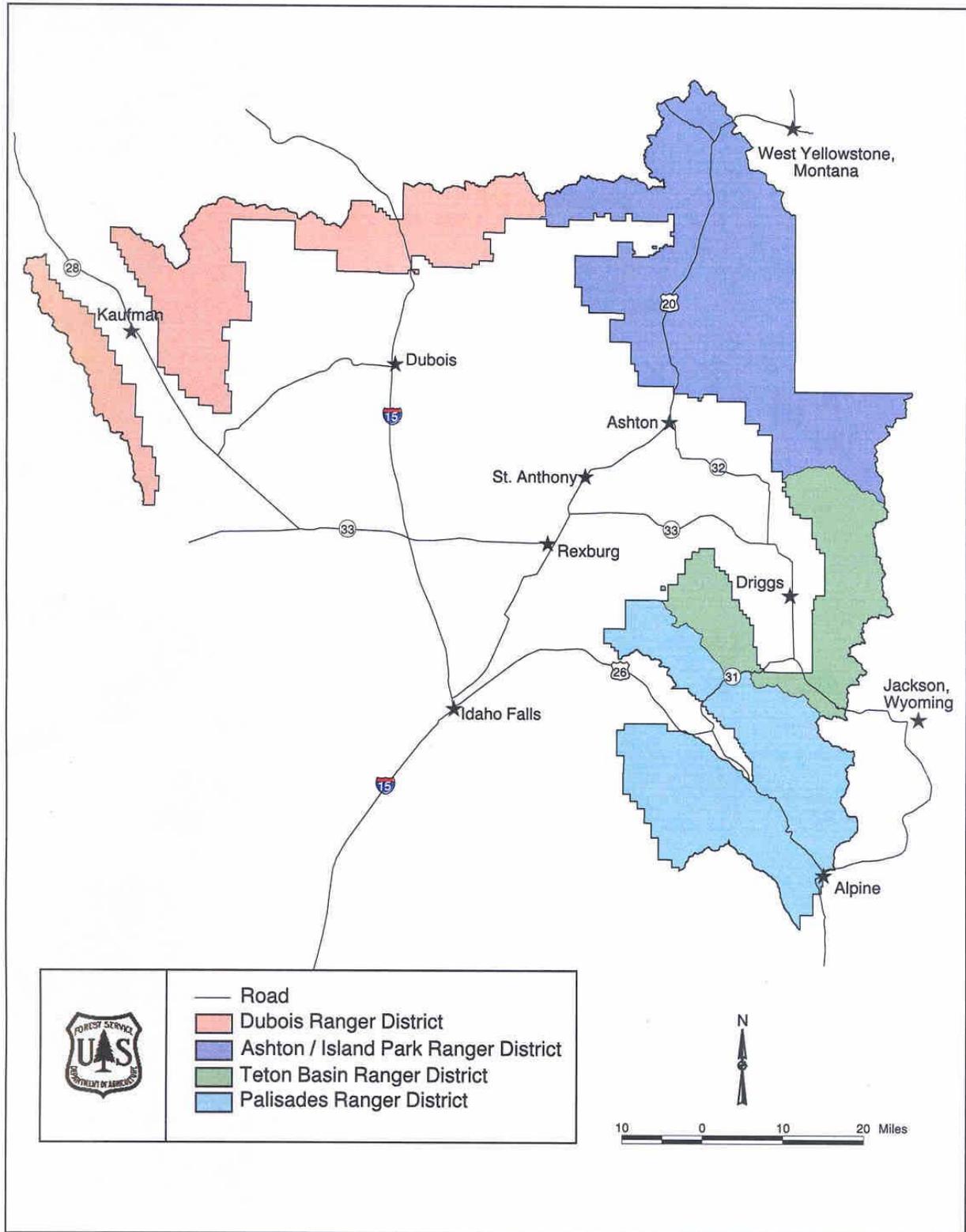


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