

Dixie National Forest

DRAFT Setting, Niche, and Challenge Statements Version 1.0

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DIXIE SETTING STATEMENT

Broad Vision Statement

The Dixie National Forest (Dixie) is a stunning and diverse part of Southern Utah. It provides high quality water to the region and diverse recreation opportunities to the nation. The Dixie is also a “working” Forest. Livestock grazing, timber management, mineral exploration, and special forest product opportunities are provided in a sustainable manner. Current forest management recognizes and values the fundamental components of soil, water, air, fish, vegetation, and wildlife. Management of the Forest is sustainable with consideration of natural climate and disturbance regimes.

Southern Utah – A Spectacular Place

American Indians have been drawn to the red rock country of southwestern Utah for thousands of years. In more recent memory, Mormon pioneers settled Utah’s land of Dixie – nicknamed “Dixie” because the Mormons cultivated cotton in the arid lands – one hundred and fifty years ago. Both American Indians and the pioneers no doubt marveled at the natural wonders abundant in this part of the world.

In the early 1900’s the Dixie National Forest was established to provide management for this magical area. Currently, the Forest is headquartered in Cedar City. There are five Ranger Districts on the Forest located in the following cities: St. George, Cedar City, Panguitch, Escalante, and Teasdale.

The Dixie is the largest of six National Forests in the State of Utah. It covers almost two million acres and stretches over almost 200 miles of land in the Washington, Iron, Garfield, Kane, Wayne, and Piute counties.

Interstate 15 runs along the western edge of the Forest (with the exception of the Pine Valley Range located west of I-15). State Highway 89 runs north and south through the middle of the Forest. State Highway 12 – a scenic byway – bisects much of the Forest west to east. In addition to these notable routes, there are several other popular roads designated as either scenic byways or backways that provide access to the Forest.

Park and Monument Wonders Extend Into the Forest

The wonders of Zion, Bryce Canyon, and Capitol Reef National Parks, as well as the Grand Staircase-Escalante and Cedar Breaks National Monuments, are located adjacent to the Forest. Much of the red rock beauty that characterizes the parks and monuments extends onto the Forest. Red sandstone formations in Red Canyon and on the Aquarius

Plateau rival Bryce Canyon. Views into the Box Death Hollow Wilderness Area from the historic Hell's Backbone Bridge and from Powell Point over the Grand Staircase are breathtaking. Locals and visitors from the Salt Lake City area cherish hiking and fishing areas on Boulder Mountain. The rugged beauties of the Pine Valley Mountains north of St. George provide a cool refuge to visitors, from Las Vegas and Southern California, as well as the local area.

Weather Conditions Vary Throughout the Year

The Forest has many climatic extremes. Precipitation ranges from 10 inches in the lower elevations to more than 40 inches per year near Brian Head Peak. During winter and spring, much of the precipitation comes in the form of snow, with a deep snowpack accumulating in many of the high elevations. By late spring, temperatures warm up in the canyon country and low elevations, while the mountain snowpack begins to melt. The high mountain roads and trails are not normally free of snow until mid to late June. Summer brings warm temperatures to most areas, with hot temperatures in the canyon country. Thunderstorms are common over the Forest during the summer months and can produce heavy rains. With these storms, flash flooding is a possible hazard in gullies and narrow canyons. In most areas, August is the wettest month of the year.

Temperature extremes can be impressive with summer temperatures exceeding 100 degrees Fahrenheit in the valleys and winter lows exceeding negative 30 degrees Fahrenheit on some of the plateau tops.

High Mountain Plateaus Gather Water and Bring Life to Local Communities

Geographically, the Forest is uniquely situated straddling the divide between the Great Basin and the Colorado Plateau. Elevations vary from 2,800 feet near St. George to 11,322 feet at Blue Bell Knoll on the Boulder Mountain. The high altitude forests of the Markagunt, Paunsaugunt, and Aquarius Plateaus make up much of the Forest. Boulder Mountain is one of the largest high elevation plateaus in the United States. The Pine Valley Mountains and Wilderness Area, located near St. George and within an easy drive from Las Vegas, are a welcome oasis adjacent to the Mojave Desert.

Water is especially important in this semiarid climate and small streams from the Forest "feed" the valleys and surrounding communities with this most valuable commodity. X number of local communities obtain at least part of their municipal culinary water supply from spring sources within the Forest boundary. Municipal supply watershed special designations have been designated for x number of these systems.

Anglers enjoy fishing in Panguitch Lake and the hundreds of lakes on Boulder Mountain. Streams on the Forest provide many local children with an introduction to trout fishing.

Canyons cut by these streams have colorful walls revealing a variety of geology. There is a mix of sedimentary and volcanic rocks as this is the transition zone between the Colorado Plateau and the Basin & Range Provinces.

Forest Vegetation is Diverse and Constantly Changing

Vegetation is reflective of the variety of soils, climatic patterns, disturbance history, and elevational features of the Dixie National Forest. The lower and drier slopes are dominated by pinyon pine and juniper mixed with sagebrush interspersed with an occasional lush meadow or riparian zone. Deep furrowed yellow barked ponderosa pine appears at the mid elevations as moisture increases. Higher elevation areas are dominated by aspen mixed with Englemann spruce and subalpine fir. In the fall, vast expanses of golden and red leaves can be seen as thousands of acres of aspen change color. Intermixed in the differing elevational and moisture regimes other vegetation types occur including mixed conifer and mountain shrubs. The mixed conifer offer a variety of green textures and colors based on the composition of the species residing in the area. Bristlecone pine, one of the oldest living organisms on the planet, is a rare species found on the Dixie. A number of endemic and listed plants only occur on the Dixie such as *Astragalus perianus*, which only occurs on Mount Dutton at about 10,000 feet.

The current vegetation mix on the Forest is constantly changing. In the past, natural disturbances such as fire or insects have affected the mix. Today many of these natural disturbance processes are not operating as they have in the past. Consequently, for instance, many of the large aspen stands on the Dixie are being invaded by spruce/fir forest, and pinyon pine and juniper have invaded grass/forb and sagebrush areas.

Big Game Hunting and Fishing, As Well As Wildlife Viewing, Are Popular Activities on the Forest

The Dixie has a diverse collection of wildlife. There are healthy populations of big game. Additionally, the over 3,100 acres of lakes and reservoirs and 330 miles of streams provide good opportunities to fish for different species of trout including rare Bonneville and Colorado cutthroat trout. Wild turkey is another game species that is prospering on the Forest.

In addition to game species, the Forest provides a home for numerous other species of wildlife. The Forest contributes toward meeting recovery goals for several threatened and endangered species, such as the Utah Prairie Dog.

From Prehistoric Times to Present Time, People Have Felt Strong Connections to This Unique Land – Their Marks Can Be Found All Over the Land

Attracted to the cool elevations above the desert floor, inhabitants of the region from American Indians to early Pioneers to workers for the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) have left their mark upon the Forest. Remnants can be found of Anasazi, Fremont, Paiute, and Ute Indian civilizations. Native people still use the Forest to gather traditional plants, such as roots, herbs, and pinyon nuts.

Pioneers built many of the early settlements adjacent to the Forest and developed the timber, range, and mineral resources found on the Dixie. Early in last century, the CCC developed water improvements and USFS administration facilities that serve as a reminder of the past.

The Dixie National Forest is located in Garfield, Kane, Iron, Piute, Washington, and Wayne counties. These counties (and their constituent communities) have strong social and cultural ties to the Forest. Many of the early pioneers of the area earned their living through ranching, mining, and timber. Today, leisure and recreation economies that take advantage of the unique beauties and rugged character of the public lands of the region are growing in importance. While resource based economies have declined in the last century, the social and cultural ties to the land continue to be very strong. The Dixie – and other adjacent public lands – is a gathering place for family reunions and church groups.

Today, on much of the private property within Forest boundaries and directly adjacent to the Forest, recreational development is flourishing. Brian Head Ski Resort – for example – attracts many visitors to the area from the population centers of southern Nevada and California. Private cabins dot Cedar Mountain and Pine Valley as well as other parts of the Forest.

The Dixie is a Mecca of Recreational Opportunities

Population growth and migration in the American West have increased demands on the Dixie. However, the Forest continues to provide a variety of recreational opportunities. Pine Valley, Box Death Hollow, and Ashdown Gorge Wilderness Areas make up 83,000 acres of the Forest. More developed areas also exist and accommodate such activities as: OHV riding, camping, picnicking, resort lodging, biking, snowmobiling, cross-country and snow skiing. Dispersed activities such as: fishing, hunting, and viewing scenery are also abundant.

There are many exciting trails on the Dixie for motorized and non-motorized travel. Mountain bikers, hikers, ATV enthusiasts, and horseback riders will all find a trail to suit their interests. The Great Western Trail traverses several parts of the Forest.

In addition to trails, there are numerous camping opportunities on the Forest. Dispersed camping opportunities are abundant on each ranger district. The Forest also provides many high quality developed camping opportunities. In many of these campgrounds, the Forest accommodates large groups.

DIXIE NICHE STATEMENT

On a global and national scale, the Dixie National Forest:

- Provides a gateway to some of the most beautiful national monument and national park land in the country.

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- ❑ Provides a refuge for a variety of rare species of plant and animal.
- ❑ Provides three unique wilderness areas: Pine Valley Wilderness, Ashdown Gorge Wilderness, and Box Death Hollow Wilderness.
- ❑ Provides several scenic driving routes.
- ❑ Provides a repository of valuable cultural artifacts and sites for several ancient and current American Indian cultures.
- ❑ Provides an opportunity to view and experience world-class geological settings.
- ❑ Provides vast backcountry recreation opportunities adjacent to popular national parks that do not allow as much freedom in their backcountry.
- ❑ Provides several nationally recognized trails and trail systems.

On a regional scale, the Dixie National forest:

- ❑ Provides group camping facilities and opportunities for many family reunions.
- ❑ Provides culinary and agricultural water to adjacent communities parched by the desert climate of the region.
- ❑ Provides a cool respite from the heat of the lower elevation deserts.
- ❑ Provides unique recreational activities for regional visitors.

DIXIE CHALLENGES STATEMENT

The Dixie faces several important challenges to management in the future. These challenges are related to population migration, changes in economics, and conflicts with Forest resources. Here are some challenges that we anticipate in the next 20 years.

- ❑ Local communities have strong links with commodity production. This commodity production can be in conflict with Forest desired conditions related to wildlife, watersheds, and vegetation.
- ❑ Rising visitor use of these forests is putting pressure on “natural landscapes” and the wildlife and vegetation that depend on these landscapes.
- ❑ Much of the visitation on the Dixie is from Las Vegas and the Wasatch Front. Many of these visitors do not see the impacts of their visitation because they come and use the Forest and leave it before the impacts can be viewed.
- ❑ Many of the new Forest visitors do not speak English and this creates a challenge for educating visitors to proper use of the Forest.
- ❑ With increased development near the Forest, there is a great concern over wildland urban interfaces and encroachment upon key wildlife habitats.
- ❑ As available land shrinks due to increased recreation and population growth, conflicts between big game enthusiasts and livestock operators could continue to grow.