Background and instructions for review of the Fishlake NF and Dixie NF undeveloped area evaluations.

As directed by regulation and Forest Service Manual and Handbook direction, the Fishlake and Dixie National Forests have been considering unroaded and undeveloped areas for potential wilderness recommendation.

The first step was to inventory and map these areas. For this we used the Region 4 Protocol for Identifying and Evaluating Areas for Potential Wilderness. This identified areas that met the criteria for size, presence of roads, and presence of other facilities or influences of man. For more details on these criteria or this process, please see the latest version of the protocol dated October 28, 2004. The resulting inventory is still in draft form; comments and suggestions are welcome.

Each of the areas was then evaluated for potential wilderness designation. Direction from the Forest Service Handbook for Wilderness Evaluation (1909.12 Chapter 7) was followed to evaluate areas against the tests of capability, availability and need. The format of the evaluation is from the Region 4 protocol described above. To aid consistency, the Fishlake NF and Dixie NF developed definitions and descriptions for each of the evaluation elements. For more details on this please consult our draft Data Dictionary (August 15, 2004).

The evaluation for each area contains 5 parts.

The first part is a **summary table** that compares the current area to the last inventory which was completed about 1983.

The next part, labeled **Section 1**, is a brief description of the area.

> If you have specific knowledge of the area, please review our draft description. Comments that refine or improve our description of the vegetation, topography, current uses, etc. are very appreciated. Please keep in mind that we are trying to be concise.

Section 2 is a table summary of the area's capability to function as wilderness. In other words, it is a summary of the wilderness characteristics and values that the area may contain. Capability is a combination of manageability, natural integrity, natural appearance, opportunities for solitude, opportunities for challenge and primitive recreation, remoteness, and special features. These values are described in greater detail in the Data Dictionary [link to data dictionary].

> Again, if you have specific knowledge of this area, please carefully review this section. Consider our description of low, medium and high ratings in the data dictionary for each of the characteristics. Please comment if you agree or disagree with our draft ratings and tell us why.

Section 3 is a summary of availability concerns. These are the trade-offs that might be encountered if an area were designated as wilderness. The intent of this section is described in greater detail in the data dictionary.

If you are familiar with this area, please review and provide comments that refine or improve the draft discussion of potential trade-offs.

Section 4 is a table to summarize the "need" for an area to be designated as wilderness. We have filled in the distance to designated wilderness and the distance to population centers (This also provides a measure of an area's "remoteness"). The rest will be filled as we receive comments from the public, interested groups, cooperating agencies, and others. Please see the data dictionary for further discussion of the contents of this section.

Comments on this section might address questions like these:

To what degree could the area contribute to the local and national distribution of wilderness?

Is there a need for designation because of increased pressure on a nearby wilderness?

What is the interest in designation of this area from the public, elected officials, and congress?

Please remember that there is no "calculus" for wilderness recommendation. There is no combination of ratings or section descriptions that would automatically compel the Forest Supervisors to recommend, or not to recommend, an area for inclusion into the national wilderness system. However, these values, characteristics and descriptions will help inform the Forest Supervisors decisions. We will gather input from the public, interest groups, internal analysis, and elected officials and synthesize for review by the Forest Supervisors. Comments on these evaluations would be most useful if received before **January 21, 2005.** Thank you for your consideration and input.