

**CHAPTER 1  
PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION**

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In compliance with its own laws and regulations, and in accordance with the Council of Environmental Quality regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) for implementing the procedural provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Forest Service is proposing to modify or delete current programmatic direction, and add direction in response to new information concerning management of habitat for the northern goshawk and its prey. Direction developed as part of this project will be in the form of an amendment to specific Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans).

Under the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), each unit of the National Forest System (NFS) is managed under a comprehensive land and resource management plan, or forest plan. Forest plans are programmatic documents; they determine the overall direction under which a national forest will operate. Much like a county master plan or zoning ordinance, a forest plan sets broad goals and identifies standards, or requirements, under which specific projects must be carried out. Decisions on individual projects, based on site-specific analysis, then allow the agency to proceed with a specific activity in a certain place and time, given adequate funding, resources, and so forth.

Forest plans describe goals, objectives, standards and guidelines which are collectively referred to as "management direction." Goals describe a desired condition of a resource component. They are timeless and are usually expressed in broad, general terms. Objectives are concise, time-specific statements that are typically a measurable planned result that respond to a pre-established goal. Standards and guidelines comprise "sideboards" that the agency must work within. Essentially they operate like city zoning ordinances permitting, prohibiting, and/or regulating activities designed and implemented to further achievement of related goals and objectives.

Forest plans provide, among other things, direction to manage fish and wildlife habitat to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the particular planning area. Habitat must be provided to support, at least, a minimum number of reproductive individuals in habitats that are well distributed so that those individuals can interact with others in the planning area as required by the regulations that implement NFMA (36 CFR §219.19).

## 1.2 BACKGROUND

The northern goshawk (*Accipiter gentilis*) is the largest North American member of the genus *Accipiter*. It breeds in coniferous, deciduous, and mixed forests throughout much of North America. The goshawk is a forest habitat generalist that uses a variety of forest types, forest ages, structural conditions, and successional stages. It preys on small to medium-sized birds and mammals.

In October 1991, the USDA Forest Service, Intermountain Region designated the goshawk as a sensitive species. In March 1997, the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources classified the goshawk as a sensitive species. Both actions identify the goshawk as a species vulnerable to population declines or habitat loss and prompts management actions for its conservation.

In 1992 and 1993, the Intermountain Regional Forester directed Forests to draw from the intent of the Reynolds et al. (1992) management recommendations for management of habitat for goshawk and its prey, as well as other pertinent scientific information. Forests were to continue to do this until such time that a Utah-specific habitat assessment and conservation strategy was developed. The assessment and strategy for Utah was completed in 1998; the assessment was published in 1999.

Based on findings documented in Supplemental Information Reports (SIRs) completed by each national forest in Utah the Intermountain Regional Forester decided that amendments to Forest Plans were required to address new information found in the assessment and strategy.

### **1.2.1 The Assessment Of Habitat In Utah**

Managers rarely have all the information needed to conduct a fully quantitative population viability analysis (PVA); this is the case for the northern goshawk. In the face of missing demographic information, one practical alternative is to use inventories of the quality, quantity and distribution of suitable habitat as a surrogate for PVA. The primary assumption is that if vegetative communities and their processes are similar today to those occurring historically, then conditions approximate those under which species evolved. Presumably, therefore, the full complement of species will persist.

In July 1998, Dr. Russell T. Graham (research forester, Rocky Mountain Research Station, a recognized expert in the field of developing large scale habitat assessments, and experienced in management of habitat for the northern goshawk) along with an interagency team of biologists from Utah, completed an *Assessment of Habitat Conditions in Utah for the Northern Goshawk and its Prey* (hereinafter referred to as Assessment). This Assessment was published in 1999 (Graham et al. 1999). In the Executive Summary, Graham et al. state "at the local level (forest level and lower) this assessment outlines a process that should be used to describe goshawk habitat, proper functioning condition, or other forest or woodland characteristics of interest. At this level, fine resolution data should be used to describe these characteristics, and this assessment can be used to provide context. In addition, at this level, the *Management Recommendations for the Northern Goshawk in the Southwestern United States* (Reynolds et al. 1992) should be used to help prepare site prescriptions. Data in this assessment are too coarse for making site prescriptions and should only be used to provide context and describe processes when used at these levels." (Graham et al. 1999).

Graham et al. (1999) continue by emphasizing that "this assessment does not prescribe implementation methods. It describes desired conditions, with managers needing to decide how and if they will be used." At the scale (i.e., state level) of the Assessment, it was inappropriate to address local level site prescriptions/recommendations; it was outside the scope of the assessment project. In addition, site prescriptions/recommendations were already provided in Reynolds (1992), and did not require duplication in the Graham et al. Assessment.

The Assessment found that goshawk habitat quality was declining. It concludes:

"Because of fire exclusion, insect and disease epidemics, timber harvest, livestock grazing, or a combination of these factors the forests and woodlands of Utah have changed drastically since the early 1900's. Forests are now dominated by mid- to late successional species (Douglas-fir, white fir and subalpine fir) rather than the early successional species (lodgepole and ponderosa pine). Along with these changes came suspected declines in goshawk populations ...The present conditions of forests and woodlands of Utah are prone to insect and disease epidemic in addition to the risk of stand replacing fires. To ensure the goshawk's continued existence in Utah will require the restoration of these degraded habitats and the protection of native process." (Graham et al. 1999)

Though the Assessment could not directly answer the question of goshawk population viability because of inadequate demographic data, the authors state:

"Most of the currently forested lands were rated as medium or high value for both nesting and foraging habitat. Where surveys have been conducted, goshawks are present and are nesting successfully. Furthermore, all available habitat patches are connected, and no known population is isolated. In general, existing habitat appears to be capable of supporting a viable population of goshawks at the State spatial scale." (ibid.)

However, the authors also caution:

"Current management policies ... provide for a wide range of implementation options, with a correspondingly wide range of possible effects on goshawk habitat ... Current management policies have the potential to degrade habitat if any one activity is overapplied or misapplied." (ibid.)

### **1.2.2 The Conservation Strategy and Interagency Agreement**

Following completion of the Assessment, the interagency team (without Dr. Graham) prepared a "Conservation Strategy and Agreement for the Management of Northern Goshawk Habitat in Utah" (HCS). The HCS was designed to maintain "adequate nesting and foraging goshawk habitat that is well connected throughout the State of Utah in order to sustain a viable population of goshawks." (Utah NFs et al. 1998)

In the HCS, the authors state "when developing site specific prescriptions the ecological principals and assessment process found within the *Management Recommendations for the Northern Goshawk in the Southwestern United States* (Reynolds et al. 1992) should be used. The recommendations from Reynolds et al. (1992) represent the best available scientific information for forming the development of site prescriptions and should be considered a component of this HCS when designing project level prescriptions." (ibid.)

Later in the strategy, the authors state "the Reynolds recommendations do not address all cover types, growth conditions, fire regimes, or historic vegetative patterns found in the State of Utah." (ibid.) Because of this, the interagency team proceeded to identify habitat attributes found in Reynolds, or Utah cover types not addressed in Reynolds, that had to be modified/added to address habitat conditions in Utah. In addition, the team also identified Utah-specific interagency coordination needs for habitat assessment and monitoring.

This team also recognized that better local data may indicate that site conditions in some areas of an administrative unit will differ from those described in the HCS or Reynolds recommendations. In these cases, they suggested that administrative units modify identified habitat values (i.e., canopy, snags, etc.) in recommendations using the better local data and the Reynolds habitat evaluation process. Essentially, units should use the best data available to determine the habitat value that is most appropriate on a site to meet the intended habitat need; if better data is *not* available, use the HCS or Reynolds recommended value should be used. (ibid.)

The HCS was completed in October 1998. The accompanying "Interagency Agreement," signed in October 1998 by the participating agencies, stated: "The signatory agencies agree that this strategy

represents the best available scientific information on the northern goshawk and its use of habitat in the State of Utah, and recommend that field offices apply the strategy through their own processes with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance where appropriate." (ibid.) Participating agencies were the Forest Service (FS), Bureau of Land Management (BLM), US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), and the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR).

Speaking to the issue of viability, the HCS states:

"Based on the findings in Graham et al. (1998) that good quality habitat is well distributed and connected throughout the State of Utah, the absence of evidence of a population decline on National Forest System lands since 1991, and consistency with findings by the FWS, we believe the current goshawk population is viable in the State of Utah." (ibid.)

The HCS suggests additional site specific measures to ensure that habitat for the goshawk is managed consistently across federal and state lands in Utah. According to the authors, "consistency in management of habitat is key to providing a reasonable probability of goshawk persistence." (ibid.)

### **1.2.3 Supplemental Information Reports (SIRs)**

In signing the interagency agreement attached to the HCS, the Forest Service committed to:

"... initiating NEPA procedures which consider adopting the recommendations in the strategy as interim direction through amendments to the Regional Guide and Utah National Forest Plans, as appropriate. Alternatives to recommendations in the strategy will be considered during the appropriate NEPA compliance process." (ibid.)

Since the Assessment determined that more than 80% of the suitable habitat for the northern goshawk in Utah occurs on NFS lands, Intermountain Regional Forester Jack A. Blackwell directed Utah Forest Supervisors to assess the sufficiency of management direction in current forest plans to allow use of new information, including management recommendations, found in the Assessment and HCS. The Forest Supervisors determined that while current management direction will allow for use of the recommendations at the project level, some direction was so broad that it also allowed actions that could degrade goshawk habitat. As a result, they determined that amendments were needed to delete or modify current direction, or add new direction, to provide reasonable assurance that goshawk habitat will be maintained or restored. Amendments were also needed to provide consistency in management of habitat among and across national forests and other land management agencies in Utah. These decisions are documented in each national forest's SIR (project record, exhibit K, section c).

Regional Forester Blackwell assigned an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team, led by Uinta National Forest Supervisor Peter W. Karp, to develop management direction for NFS lands on the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache NFs. This direction will incorporate new information from the Assessment and HCS.

## **1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED**

### **1.3.1 Purpose**

This project was initiated not because the agency was concerned that we would lose a viable population of goshawks prior to revision of Forest Plans in Utah (projected to be 4 years), but in response to identified concerns that current management strategies permitted actions that could degrade habitat and did not emphasize some actions needed to maintain or restore goshawk habitat. In addition, new direction was needed to provide greater consistency in management of habitat for the goshawk. Current direction is not sufficient to provide consistency, resulting in a variety of interpretations on how to manage goshawk habitat. For a far-ranging species such as the goshawk that spans multiple national forests and other jurisdictional boundaries, consistency in habitat management is an essential component of actions needed to provide reasonable assurances that habitat to support viable goshawk populations can be sustained in the future.

Due to the important role NFS lands play in restoring or maintaining habitat for the northern goshawk in Utah, the Intermountain Region elected to take action to determine how to incorporate principles recommended in the HCS into management actions proposed in the future. This action will contribute to on-going interagency efforts to prevent the goshawk from being listed as threatened or endangered. Once a species is listed as endangered or threatened, options for management can be reduced.

### **1.3.2 Need**

A habitat assessment and management recommendations for the northern goshawk and subsequent habitat conservation strategy were developed for the State of Utah in response to suspected downward trends in goshawk habitat and/or populations. Due to the important role NFS lands play in restoring or maintaining forested habitat for the northern goshawk, there is an immediate need to incorporate the principles and recommendations from these documents into management direction, for the reasons stated below.

Changes in forest structure, especially large tree removal and other forest management activities singly or in combination, may negatively affect goshawk populations (Crocker-Bedford 1990). In addition, fire exclusion has resulted in an ingrowth of forest stands by shade tolerant species. This in and of itself would likely not lead to goshawk population declines. In the short term the increase in older seral conditions may actually be beneficial. The main issue is the changes in fire severity and risk of large scale habitat losses from catastrophic fire and insect events that would ultimately lead to a loss of nesting habitat (Bloom et al. 1986, Herron et al. 1985, Kennedy 1989) [Graham et al. 1999].

Each of the six national forests identified in Chapter 1.4.1 completed a Supplemental Information Report (SIR). The SIRs assessed the sufficiency of management direction in current forest plans to allow use of new information, including management recommendations, found in the Assessment and HCS. While current management direction would allow for use of the recommendations at the project level, some direction was so broad that it also allowed actions that could degrade goshawk habitat. As a result, it was determined that amendments to current forest plans are necessary to address new information found in the assessment and strategy.

## 1.4 GEOGRAPHIC RANGE AND SCOPE

### 1.4.1 Geographic Range

The Proposed Action provides management direction for affected forested habitats on NFS lands within the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache National Forests (NF) (hereinafter referred to as Utah's NFs) of the Intermountain Region. Specifically, the geographic area described includes the majority of NFS lands in the State of Utah, with small portions of Wyoming and Colorado. The total NFS lands within these six national forests is approximately 8.1 million acres; 7.98 million acres in Utah, 90,000 acres in Wyoming and 30,000 acres in Colorado. Coniferous and aspen forests occur on approximately 3.9 million acres of this 8.1 million acres.

### 1.4.2 Scope

Under the provisions of the NFMA, this action will amend current management direction in six forest plans. It will provide consistency in future project design, implementation and monitoring on the Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache NFs where habitat for the goshawk and its prey is involved. When forest plans for the affected national forests are revised, the management direction adopted through this amendment will be integrated as needed to best meet the intent of the conservation strategy and assessment (Figure 1).

## 1.5 SUMMARY OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Proposed Action (Alternative B) consists of goals, standards and guidelines necessary to implement *The Utah Northern Goshawk: Habitat Assessment and Management Recommendations* (Graham et al. 1999) and "The Conservation Strategy and Agreement for the Management of Northern Goshawk Habitat in Utah" (Utah National Forests et al. 1998). The Proposed Action allows management which mimics the variability of size, intensity, and frequency of native disturbance regimes within the full historic range of variation, including extreme events.

There are four aspects of the Proposed Action:

1. Desired Habitat Condition (DHC): This is a portrayal of land conditions expected to result from implementing the proposed management direction. It describes the desired habitat quantity, quality and distribution for the goshawk and its prey that the agency intends to strive for over time. This DHC is provided because current forest plan Desired Future Condition (DFC) descriptions lack the detail relating to the desired habitat for goshawk and its prey. A more detailed description is needed to understand the purpose of the proposed "management direction." This DHC is intended to be an integral part of current forest plan DFC discussions, not replace it.
2. National Forest System lands affected: This is a description of the NFS lands within the geographic area described above where the proposed management direction will and will not be applied.
3. Application of management direction: This describes what projects the management direction in the Proposed Action will be applied to, if adopted.
4. Proposed Management Direction and Monitoring Requirements: Forest plans include goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, collectively referred to as "management direction." Management direction found in the Proposed Action will supplement the current broader forest plan goals, standards and guidelines. A monitoring plan is also included.



## **1.6 DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

The decision to be made through this project is how much and what type of management direction is needed to guide project design and implementation until forest plans are revised to provide reasonable assurance that we will:

- maintain or restore sufficient habitat needed to support the currently viable population of goshawks for the interim period;
- retain goshawk habitat management options so that they can be considered during forest plan revision.

Each alternative considered for detailed study (2.3.2) includes varying amounts and types of management direction addressing these factors. The Intermountain Regional Forester will decide either to adopt the Proposed Action, an alternative to the Proposed Action, or select the No Action Alternative. The alternative selected will specify the management direction that will amend the six Utah forest plans (Ashley, Dixie, Fishlake, Manti-LaSal, Uinta, and Wasatch-Cache).

It has already been determined, based on the best information available, that there is a viable goshawk population in Utah and sufficient habitat is currently available to support this population (Graham et al. 1999, Utah National Forests et al. 1998). Retaining a viable population depends on the agency's ability to maintain sufficient amounts of suitable habitat. Though long term direction for management of habitat for the goshawk will be addressed in future forest plan revision efforts, current planning direction must be modified sufficiently to carry forests through the interim period between the present and when the decision documents for their revised plans are signed.

The management direction adopted through this project will not change the physical environment; there is no irretrievable or irreversible commitment of resources. Any subsequent site-specific action that may change the environment, and which uses this direction to guide project design and implementation, will be subject to appropriate site-specific analyses required by NEPA.

## **1.7 ORGANIZATION OF THE REMAINDER OF THIS DOCUMENT**

Chapter 2 describes internal and external public involvement activities, issues and concerns with the Proposed Action identified through these efforts, and how the issues and concerns are addressed or resolved. Alternative management direction responding to identified issues and concerns is included in this chapter. Described in-depth are the alternatives considered but eliminated from detailed study (2.3.1) and alternatives considered in detail, including the Proposed Action (2.3.2). The Chapter ends with a comparison of alternatives (2.4) providing a synopsis of the effects disclosure (Chapter 4) for each alternative.

Chapter 3 describes the existing condition of specific resources potentially affected by the amendment.

Chapter 4 describes the effects of changing, or not, management direction which guides future project design and implementation relative to achievement resource goals and objectives, and ultimately the desired habitat condition. Direct, indirect, and cumulative effects for all alternatives carried for detailed study, including no action, are discussed.

The list of preparers, references used within the document and glossary are provided after Chapter 4, prior to the appendices.

The Appendices contain (a) specific management direction by alternative; (b) monitoring requirements by alternative; (c) maps of exempted areas on each national forest corresponding with discussions at section 2.3.2; (d) detailed discussions of HRV and PFC, and canopy closures; (e) relevant tables corresponding to discussions in Chapter 3; (f) goshawk habitat maps referenced in Chapter 3; (g) the biological resources cumulative effects map showing geographic area considered for vegetation and wildlife; (h) biological assessments and evaluations; (i) example of the biological pre-field survey form referenced in proposed management direction (Appendix A, s-5).