Record of Decision

Section I - Introduction

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the basis and rationale for my decision to select Alternative 8 as the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan) for the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (NFGT). The ROD presents my reasons for selecting Alternative 8 to be the Revised Plan for approximately 675,000 acres of four National Forests and two Grasslands administered from the Supervisor's Office in Lufkin, Texas. In making this decision I considered the environmental, social, and economic consequences of the alternatives disclosed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

Purpose and Need to Revise

The purpose and need for the Revised Plan for the NFGT is to provide a new framework or strategy for future site-specific decisions that maximizes net public benefits and accomplishes the USDA Forest Service mission.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires each National Forest be managed under a Forest Plan. Forest Plans direct all resource management activities in the National Forests and Grasslands. NFMA also requires Plans to be reviewed every five years and revised "from time to time when the Secretary finds conditions in a unit have significantly changed, but at least every 15 years" (36 CFR 219.10 [g]). A Plan may be revised sooner if circumstances warrant. A formal review of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) findings (See Plan Chapter V) is required at least every five years to determine if resource conditions and issues and concerns have changed significantly enough to require change in management direction, further amendments, or revisions.

The first reason to revise arose from litigation over the effect of Forest Service practices within the NFGT on the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW). On June 17, 1988, the Federal District Court for the Eastern District of Texas enjoined the Forest Service for failing to implement certain practices and activities within 1,200 meters of active and inactive RCW cluster sites (Sierra Club v. Lyng, 694 F. Supp. 1260). The court's ruling affected the management of approximately one-third of the National Forest lands in Texas, and in April 1990, the Chief of the Forest Service directed the Regional Forester to determine whether the changed circumstances resulting from the court's order required revision or other change to the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP). Consequently, in October 1990, the NFGT initiated the process of revising the Plan. The court-ordered management of about 174,000 acres within the 1,200-meter circles surrounding active and inactive RCW clusters are managed under the Comprehensive Plan developed to comply with the district court's June 17 and October 20, 1988 orders. These areas will continue to be managed for the RCW pursuant to the Comprehensive Plan unless and until the outcome of the litigation allows the Forest Service to implement the Regional RCW Strategy and the direction contained in this ROD.

Secondly, the Five-Year Review and Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) of the Revised Plan conducted in 1992 revealed additional areas where changes were needed. Most of these

needed to implement many of the proposed changes. The Revised Plan provides the opportunity to address issues and concerns, update inventories, and also to analyze the effects of those changes

within one integrated analysis. The FEIS provides the analysis of ways to address the issues, proposed changes, and selection of the alternative that best maximizes net public benefits and accomplishes the Forest Service mission. It changes the 1987 Plan and other previous management direction, standards, and guidelines. Chapter I of the FEIS and other sections within this ROD present the new decisions and management direction.

Authority to Plan and Revise

The NFGT Revised Plan and FEIS were prepared under the authority of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSYA) (16 U.S.C. 528-531), the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resource Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), as amended by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) (16 U.S.C. 1601-1614), the implementing code of Federal Regulations of NFMA (36 CFR Part 219), and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321-4335) and its implementing regulations (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508).

What a Forest Plan Is & Is Not

The NFGT Revised Plan is the product of a comprehensive notice and comment process established by the RPA and NFMA for management of the National Forest System lands in an environmentally sound manner to produce goods and services. The Revised Plan establishes a framework for future decision making by outlining broad general multiple-use programs, projections, or targets for achieving multiple-use goals and objectives. Information regarding outputs and effects beyond the first 10-year period is provided only to broadly indicate the anticipated consequences if continued into the future.

The Revised Plan is a strategy for applying general management practices at various intensities to land areas to achieve multiple-use goals and objectives in the most cost-efficient manner. To respond to changing needs and opportunities, Congressional land designations, catastrophic events, or major new management or production technologies, the Plan may have to be amended or revised. If there is a significant change to the Plan, it must be altered by a procedure identical to that used in developing and approving the original Plan. If changes are not significant, the Forest Supervisor may amend the Plan by less extensive procedures which would still include public participation.

The Revised Plan does not direct site-specific management activities such as constructing a trail or campground, or harvesting timber at specific locations, nor does it dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations, i.e. personnel matters, law enforcement, fleet equipment, or internal organization changes. However, the FEIS that accompanies the Revised Plan provides analytical data disclosing the environmental consequences of alternative management strategies if they were implemented.

All activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by annual budgets and other events like legislation or policy changes. If changes from the projected budget for any given year covered by the Revised Plan occur, projects proposed in schedules may have to be postponed. However, the goals and objectives in the Revised Plan would not change unless and until the Revised Plan was amended or revised.

are proposed. Due to these analyses, significant changes may be required resulting in amendments or revision to the Revised Plan. Any resulting documents are to be tiered to the FEIS for this Revised Plan, and other appropriate Regional EIS's, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

The Revised Plan replaces the previous resource management Plan prepared for the NFGT subject

to existing rights, contracts, and specific direction established by law for special areas like wilderness, archeological sites, or national trails.

Affected Area

The planning area consists of the Angelina, Davy Crockett, Sabine, and Sam Houston National Forests in east Texas and the Caddo and Lyndon B. Johnson National Grasslands in north central Texas. There are approximately 637,000 National Forest acres in 12 counties: Angelina, Jasper, Houston, Montgomery, Nacogdoches, Newton, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, and Walker. Approximately 38,100 acres of National Grasslands are located in Fannin, Montague, and Wise counties.

The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas are located in the Western Gulf Coastal Plain having topography nearly level to rolling, except for a few sharp, steep slopes associated with major streams. The highest elevations are found on the Caddo National Grasslands ranging from 500 feet to 700 feet mean sea level (MSL). The elevations on the National Forests range from 140 feet to 590 feet MSL.

Three major reservoirs on or adjacent to the National Forests store a portion of the runoff water leaving the forests. Sam Rayburn Reservoir stores runoff from the Angelina and Sabine National Forests; the Toledo Bend Reservoir, between Texas and Louisiana, stores some of the runoff from the Sabine National Forest; and Lake Livingston collects some of the runoff from the Sam Houston National Forest. The LBJ Grassland has several tributaries to the Trinity River system.

The National Forests are within a two-hour drive of the Houston, Beaumont, and Port Arthur metropolitan areas, and the National Grasslands are within two hours of the Dallas-Ft. Worth metroplex area.

Public Involvement

The following discussion provides information concerning how issues were developed for this Plan Revision. Issues are a point of debate, discussion, or dispute which are a matter of public concern. These were developed through a public involvement process which will be briefly described below.

The Revision effort began with public participation which included involvement, coordination, and comments from federal, state, and local agencies, and tribal councils. Some of these participants included the State of Texas (the Governor's Office, Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas Forest Service, Natural Resources Conservation Commission), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Environmental Protection Agency. Representatives of county and city governments, industry groups, special interest groups, and individuals were also involved.

Numerous efforts were made to ensure that the Selected Alternative 8 considered the goals of other public agencies. Comments and letters from agencies were reviewed and analyzed, and numerous

address their concerns. (See Appendix A and K of the FEIS.)

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare this EIS was first published in the Federal Register on October 23, 1990. This NOI, along with local media and individual notification requesting comment on the Revision by November 30, 1990, generated over 4,000 comment letters which were summarized into 15 major issues.

A new NOI was published in the Federal Register on July 23, 1992, to expand the scope of the Revision and change the availability dates for the draft and final EIS. This revised NOI also identified the need to reconsider existing allocations of scenic areas, special corridors, and research natural areas. Additional details on public involvement, meetings, notices, documents and comments preceding the FEIS and Revised Plan are presented in the FEIS Appendices A and K.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Land and Resource Management Plan (Draft Plan) were prepared and available for review and comment from October through December, 1994. Over 1,800 letters were received in response to the Draft EIS and Draft Plan, all of which were reviewed and instrumental in forming the FEIS and Revised Plan. Although public involvement has been intense on various issues, it was stressed that the planning process and chosen management action was not a vote. However, the volume of comments did provide insight to issue intensity. Substantive responses and comments provided the best focus of alternative development and decision strategy.

The fifteen major issues, which seem to be consistent with well-reasoned management of public lands, were formulated and considered during the Revision process. These are discussed in greater detail in the "Rationale for Decision" section of this ROD.

Planning Records

The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team developed the Revised Plan. The ID Team has provided detailed explanations of each Revision process step, which can be found in the process (or planning) records. The FEIS contains summaries of the process records and includes references to the parent records which are on file in the Forest Supervisor's Office in Lufkin, Texas. These records can be reviewed at:

Forest Supervisor's Office
National Forests and Grasslands in Texas
701 North First Street
Lufkin, Texas 75901

Section II - Decisions

Decision

It is my decision to select Alternative 8 from the FEIS as the Land and Resource Management Plan. This Revised Plan (Alternative 8) provides a framework for managing the four National Forests and two National Grasslands in Texas.

Although the 1987 Land and Resource Management Plan is the current Plan for all the National Forests and Grasslands and will be replaced by this Revised Plan, the management within 1,200 meters of active and inactive RCW clusters remain subject to the federal district court orders issued June 17, 1988 (694 F. Supp. 1260) and October 20, 1988. These areas are currently governed by the Comprehensive Plan developed by the Forest Service in compliance with those orders.

In anticipation that the outcome of the litigation will eventually allow the Forest Service to implement standards and guidelines from the Regional RCW Strategy, this Revised Plan incorporates the Regional RCW Strategy standards and guidelines adopted for the Southern Region on June 21, 1995. Only those standards and guidelines that do not conflict with the Comprehensive Plan developed by the Forest Service, in compliance with the district court orders, may be implemented at this time. If the litigation outcome allows the Forest Service to implement the Regional RCW Strategy standards, guidelines and decisions, the Forest Supervisor shall do so without a Land and Resource Management Plan amendment. An amendment will be necessary, however, if the outcome of the litigation requires different management than that provided in those standards and guidelines.

I believe it is essential to issue this Revised Plan now to provide an updated basis for sound resource decisions and to make adjustments through better monitoring actions. This Revised Plan significantly improves responses to issues and regulations, and the latest scientific, technical, and socio-economic information. This Revised Plan has been developed to consider these factors and will make dealing with future adjustments efficient, expedient, and environmentally sound.

Future Vision

The mission of the U. S. Forest Service is "caring for the land and serving people," which guides the multiple-use character of the agency. This mission and applicable laws require the integration and application of many ideas, practices, and knowledge gained through partnerships with organizations, other government agencies, and individuals. Through the Revised Plan, which is based on the mission and principal laws relating to Forest Service activities, we will see a conservation ethic and sound land stewardship protect the peoples' land and resources for the future.

The National Forests and Grasslands in Texas managers will face many challenges while striving to achieve the Forest Service mission. These challenges will occur during efforts to blend the needs of many through resource uses, recreational experiences, and public services. The Revised Plan addresses these challenges and ensures the integrity and protection of the natural resources.

During implementation of the Revised Plan, you will see changes slowly shaping the NFGT of the future through vegetation management techniques, recreational facilities, road management, special management areas, and other management activities.

fragmented forest will become connected through land ownership adjustments, land exchanges, and acquisition.

Forest Changes: The Forest landscapes will develop an older forest appearance with some old-growth trees and fewer large areas of young pines. More areas of new growth will be interspersed with large trees left and seed trees to regenerate selective and small patch timber harvests. Openings from clearcutting will still be seen, but this technique will be used sparingly in smaller patches to provide optimum RCW habitat, and primarily to restore longer-lived longleaf or shortleaf pine ecosystems.

Grassland Changes: Native tallgrass prairie will continue to be restored and used to perpetuate the north Texas crosstimbers and blackland ecosystem. Recreation uses and cattle grazing activities will be very evident in this ecosystem. Plant communities and wildlife resources will be restored and perpetuated. Unusual and special sites will be protected or managed to ensure that viable components of the Grassland mosaic are not threatened or eliminated from the landscape.

Threatened and Endangered Species: Species listed as federally threatened or endangered are an important feature of the National Forests and Grasslands. Habitat for these flora and fauna will be promoted providing long-term viability of species and their communities.

Recreational Pursuits: Many common activities will continue; however, increasing activities on favorite areas will require more restrictive measures to protect the environment. More off-road vehicle use controls will become necessary on designated trails and open use areas. Some campgrounds may be reconstructed, closed, or moved to more suitable locations to serve the people and care for the land.

Land Allocations

The Revised Plan was developed in response to concerns raised through the public review of the DEIS and Draft Plan between October and December, 1994. Management area land allocations are described in the following categories:

MANAGEMENT AREA 1
UPLAND FOREST ECOSYSTEMS
Approximately 218,000 acres

Upland Forest Ecosystems consist of landscapes suitable for timber management with regeneration of forest communities, including restoration of longleaf pine-little bluestem and shortleaf pine-oak-hickory dominated communities capable of offering a wide-range of compatible multiple uses.

These areas, at various locations throughout the Forests, comprise less than one-half of the "general forest" in Management Area 5 of the 1987 Plan. They are located primarily on the northern and southeastern portions of the Sabine National Forest, the central portion of the Angelina National Forest, and portions of the Davy Crockett National Forest.

Landscapes within this management area will provide a range of natural settings, but all will involve an interrelationship with the forested ecosystems. Management activities will be evident throughout this area due to a focus on aggressive restoration of longleaf and shortleaf communities, as well as regeneration of all the forest communities. Many recreation activities

activities.

MANAGEMENT AREA 2

RED-COCKADED WOODPECKER EMPHASIS

Approximately 250,000 acres

Upland Pine Woodlands and Savanna Ecosystems are landscapes suitable for timber management with large, older trees within the longleaf pine-little bluestem, shortleaf pine-oak, and loblolly pine-oak dominated communities, capable of offering a wide range of compatible multiple uses; but primarily for the recovery of the RCW.

These areas where RCW habitat management will be emphasized consists of about one-half of the upland pine forests that were described as "general forest" in Management Area 5 in the 1987 Plan. They encompass all 1,200-meter circle management zones surrounding active RCW clusters and most of those zones around certain inactive RCW clusters.

Management for these areas incorporates the Regional RCW Strategy for managing the RCW. It includes most of the Sam Houston National Forest, the central and southern portions of the Sabine, northern Angelina, and northern and southeast portions of the Davy Crockett National Forest. The RCW population objective for these areas is 1,223 active clusters.

Landscapes within this management area will provide a range of natural settings with open pine and mixed pine-hardwood dominated forests. Management activities will be evident throughout these areas. Frequent prescribed fire will be used to maintain open forest conditions required by the RCW. A wide range of silvicultural practices will be used to provide a continuous forest canopy and to maintain large, older trees up to 120 years of age. The open forest conditions will favor grasses and herbs in ground level vegetation. Motorized trail riding opportunities will be restricted to designated trails on the Sam Houston National Forest and the southern Angelina National Forest.

MANAGEMENT AREA 3

GRASSLAND ECOSYSTEMS

Approximately 34,500 acres

Grassland Ecosystems are landscapes suitable for grazing on the prairie and crosstimbers communities. They are also capable of offering a wide range of compatible multiple uses.

These areas include all of Management Areas 8, 9, 10, and 11 in the 1987 Plan. This management area is found within the Oak Woods, Prairie, and Blackland Ecological Regions as described by the Texas Natural Heritage Program, and is an area typified by native tallgrass prairie and oak woodlands.

Landscapes within this management area will provide grasslands interspersed with woodland savannahs and bottomland hardwoods. Short, woody vegetation is dispersed across the prairie providing wildlife habitat and vegetative diversity. Native and non-native plants will exist; however, non-native grasses will revert to native grasses in the future. This area is managed for recreation uses, wildlife habitat, and grazing while providing for oil and gas production activities.

MANAGEMENT AREA 4

STREAMSIDE MANAGEMENT ZONES

Approximately 49,800 acres

Streamside Management Zones contain landscapes that incorporate riparian areas, jurisdictional wetlands, lakes, oxbows, and other areas in and adjacent to intermittent and perennial streams and lakeshores. These areas also include the bed, bank, and water resources of rivers, perennial and intermittent streams, wetlands, and their adjacent land areas. These areas maintain the role and function of aquatic, riparian, and wetland ecosystems capable of providing opportunities for compatible multiple uses, but principally for recreation, wildlife habitat, and watershed protection. Streamside zones, called Stringers (Management Area 15) in the 1987 Plan, included about 34,000 acres.

Landscapes within this management area will provide some of the most diverse and productive areas of the Forests and Grasslands. They provide a continuous and diverse habitat for riparian and wetland dependent species including pine, oak, and other hardwood trees which will be allowed to mature into large old trees. These areas will also serve to provide filtering to prevent sediment from reaching streams and lakes. This management area will serve as an important feature for wildlife habitat that allows unfragmented movement opportunities for species requiring these characteristics.

This management area is classified as unsuitable for timber management and will have no programmed harvests; however, some trees may be harvested from this area to improve the species diversity indigenous to the area. Roads and trails for motorized traffic will cross streamside zones at places causing the least disturbance to the ecosystem.

MANAGEMENT AREA 5

MAJOR AQUATIC ECOSYSTEMS

Approximately 16,300 acres

Major Aquatic Ecosystems contain man-made lakes and reservoirs and the lands inundated by these water bodies. These areas are suited for aquatic ecosystem management uses such as fishing, water recreation activities, and water supply.

These areas include five reservoirs on the National Grasslands and National Forest land under the Sam Rayburn and Lake Conroe Reservoirs. The Forest Service has limited management authority for Sam Rayburn and Lake Conroe waters, but the Grassland reservoirs provide clean water, boating, wildlife habitat, hunting, fishing, and other activities dependent upon aquatic environments.

MANAGEMENT AREA 6

LONGLEAF RIDGE SPECIAL AREA

Approximately 32,200 acres

This management area is part of the Upland Longleaf Pine Woodlands and Savanna Ecosystems containing landscapes suitable for timber management, providing for large, older trees within the longleaf pine-little bluestem dominated community capable of offering a range of compatible multiple uses. It is established primarily for special enhancement of the westernmost example of longleaf pine communities and species such as the RCW.

identified as "general forest" in Management Area 5 of the 1987 Plan. This area also includes all of the 1,200-meter circle management zones surrounding RCW clusters. Management for this area includes the Regional RCW Strategy as described in Management Area 2; however, a significant

portion (1,200-meter RCW management zones) will continue to be managed pursuant to the court orders of June 17, 1988, and October 20, 1988, unless and until the outcome of litigation allows implementation of the Regional RCW Strategy. The RCW population objective for this area is 162 active clusters.

This management area was added after the Draft Plan was published to include various concerns from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and the Texas Committee on Natural Resources for protection of significant plant species.

This landscape includes some of the plant communities that reach their western limits in Texas. These include longleaf pine forests and savannas, pitcher plant bogs, and evergreen acid seep forests. To maintain these plant communities and the RCW habitat, frequent prescribed fires will be used. As forests mature, reproduce, and die the overstory will become increasingly uneven. Trees of various sizes will replace present stands of uniform size. Motorized trail riding opportunities will be provided only on existing roads and trails.

MANAGEMENT AREA 7

WILDERNESS

Approximately 37,200 acres

This management area contains five forest areas congressionally designated as wilderness: Big Slough, Indian Mounds, Little Lake Creek, Turkey Hill and Upland Island. About 2,000 acres have been added to these wilderness areas through land purchases since the 1987 Plan was approved.

The Wilderness Act of 1964 describes wilderness as, "an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by humans, where a person is a visitor who does not remain, an area of undeveloped federal land containing its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of human work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) is of sufficient size as to make it practical for its preservation and use in an un-impaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value." These landscapes will be managed to comply with the requirements of the Act.

MANAGEMENT AREA 8a

RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS

Approximately 605 acres

Research Natural Areas (RNA) are part of a national network of ecological areas designated in perpetuity for research and education and/or to maintain biological diversity on National Forest System lands. Research natural areas are for non-manipulative research, observation, and study. They may also be used for implementing provisions of special acts, such as the Endangered Species Act and the monitoring provisions of the NFMA.

1987 Plan as Management Area 7, and the 225-acre Mill Creek Cove currently managed as a scenic area.

The Regional Forester may approve RNA's with new delegated authority; therefore, the approval of this ROD will establish the Mill Creek Cove RNA.

MANAGEMENT AREA 8b

PROTECTED RIVER AND STREAM CORRIDORS

Approximately 1,200 acres

This management area includes Winters Bayou and Neches River segments as Candidate Scenic and Recreation Rivers. These areas consist of free-flowing rivers and their one-quarter mile corridors. Candidate rivers must possess at least one outstandingly remarkable characteristic identified in an inventory of rivers to be eligible for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River System. (See EIS Appendix E). A decision on this inventory requires study of the river's characteristics. Such a study would be initiated by the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department to determine suitability. Only the Neches River segments were included as a candidate river corridor in the 1987 Plan.

MANAGEMENT AREA 8c

SCENIC AREAS

Approximately 4,800 acres

This management area includes Big Creek, Winters Bayou, Beech Ravines, and Upper Colorow Creek. These areas are established scenic areas in the 1987 Plan; however, this Revised Plan increases Big Creek Scenic Area from 1,420 acres to 1,920 acres; Winters Bayou Scenic Area from 710 acres to 1,587 acres; Beech Ravines Scenic Area from 516 acres to 1,020 acres; and Upper Colorow Creek Scenic Area from 100 acres to 230 acres.

The emphasis in scenic areas is on the protection, enhancement, or restoration of unique areas recognized as scenic with outstanding visual quality; and to protect, enhance, and promote sustainable populations of unique plants or plant communities. These botanical characteristics include plant specimens, plant groups, or plant communities that are significant because of their form, color, occurrence, habitat, location, life history, arrangement, ecology, rarity, or other features. They are classed as unsuitable for timber management.

MANAGEMENT AREA 8d

NATURAL HERITAGE AREAS

Approximately 4,500 acres

This management area consists of 27 sites located throughout the Forests and Grasslands. Most were identified within the Texas Natural Heritage Program Report of 1990, or in subsequent inventory and monitoring since that report was published. Management emphasis is to protect, enhance, and promote sustainable populations of unique plants or plant communities, and they are restricted from timber management and permanent facilities. These areas were not identified in the 1987 Plan for special management.

MANAGEMENT AREA 8e

SPECIAL BOTTOMLAND AREAS

Approximately 2,300 acres

These management areas are bottomlands consisting of both upland floodplains and seasonally flooded wetlands along the perimeter of Sam Rayburn Reservoir. All four areas identified along Ayish Bayou, Attoyac River, Angelina River, and Pomponaugh Creek have significant riparian or wildlife habitat characteristics where large, old trees are maintained for aesthetics and wildlife needing old-growth habitat near water.

The landscapes within this management area change seasonally due to water level fluctuations of Sam Rayburn Reservoir. Part of the year it may appear as Management Area 5 (Major Aquatic Ecosystems) and at other times as Management Area 4 (Streamside Management Zones).

MANAGEMENT AREA 8f
CULTURAL HERITAGE AREAS
Approximately 2,000 acres

Old Aldridge Sawmill, Lake Fannin Camp, and Cochino, Ayish, and Attoyac Bayous include archeological and historic units of land possessing features, sites, or a concentration of sites, buildings, structures, or objects united historically or prehistorically by plan or physical development. They have been determined to be significant to understanding the prehistoric and historic occupation and utilization of the lands in which they are located.

These areas will be protected, enhanced, and/or interpreted for public education and recreation. The sites, features, and cultural materials associated with the occupation and use by indigenous and modern cultures will be defined on the ground only when they can be protected or enhanced.

MANAGEMENT AREA 9a
DEVELOPED RECREATION SITES
Approximately 6,600 acres for 9a and 9b

These are areas and sites developed to enhance camping, picnicking, swimming, boating, and fishing for National Forest visitors. Interpretation and enjoyment for using the Forest and Grassland environments are emphasized.

MANAGEMENT AREA 9b
MINIMALLY DEVELOPED RECREATION SITES
(For acres see above)

These areas consist of primitive or minimally-developed recreation sites for hunting, horseback riding, hiking, and boating, among other activities.

MANAGEMENT AREA 10a
ADMINISTRATIVE USE SITES
Approximately 50 acres

These sites and facilities are maintained and administered to provide efficient workspace for the management of the National Forest and Grasslands.

MANAGEMENT AREA 10b
SPECIAL USE PERMIT SITES
Approximately 9,650 acres

These include areas authorized for management of specific uses on National Forests and Grasslands by private parties, companies, public utilities, other agencies, or educational institutions for activities beneficial to the public or for exercising valid existing private rights to use the Forests and Grasslands.

MANAGEMENT AREA 11

SFA EXPERIMENTAL FOREST

Approximately 2,600 acres

This is the Stephen F. Austin Experimental Forest, managed for research and educational purposes with a primary function to assess impacts of forest management practices on wildlife habitat and to incorporate habitat needs into forest management.

Programmatic Decisions

In my decision, there will be programmatic changes from the 1987 Plan in the following:

Forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives, 36 CFR 219.11(b):

Chapter IV of the Revised Plan establishes goal and objective statements for biological, physical, social, economic resources, and any associated production through management as directed by the goals. This differs from direction in the 1987 Plan which described general goal statements over a wide-range of activities which were target-oriented objective resource outputs, or production actions to be accomplished. The Revised Plan clarifies forest-wide goal and objective statements by defining direction within each management area tied to a descriptive desired future condition and goals and objectives for biological, social, physical, and economic environments.

Forest-wide management requirements, 36 CFR 219.27:

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines for management actions are established to apply to all forest and grassland conditions and ecosystems. These standards and guidelines, and associated desired future condition statements provide concise direction for management. The 1987 Plan made numerous references to other documents which describe additional management direction. The Revised Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines incorporate all relevant regional direction from regional guides, environmental impact statements, and records of decision.

Management area direction, 36 CFR 219.11(c):

The Revised Plan clearly states management area descriptions, desired future condition, area emphasis, and management standards and guidelines. The 1987 Plan's specific management area direction, goals, objectives, and desired future condition were somewhat vague or sometimes absent.

Lands suitable for timber production, National Forest Management Act (NFMA) Section 6(g)(2)(A) and 36 CFR 219.14; and establishment of Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) 219.16 and 219.27(c)(2):

The Revised Plan establishes lands suitable for timber production at 486,072 acres with an ASQ of 2,046 mmcf (1,134 mmbf) for the first 10-year period. The 1987 Plan's ASQ was 1,260 mmbf, but it was amended in 1989 to 1,190 mmbf to more closely meet the reduction caused by the RCW

year may exceed the average annual ASQ so long as the total amount sold for the planning period does not exceed the ASQ.

Monitoring and evaluation requirements, 36 CFR 219.11(d) and 219.12:

The Revised Plan clarifies monitoring actions in Plan Chapter V and Appendix G by basing them on forest-wide goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines. A number of items cited in recent NFGT monitoring reports have been incorporated into the Revised Plan. Rather than simply evaluating target accomplishment, as in the 1987 Plan, the Revised Plan provides monitoring for quantitative and qualitative goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines. The monitoring actions defined in Chapter V are directly linked to Appendix G tables and sample field forms for guiding managers during project development and assessment.

Recommendations for Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, 36 CFR 219.17:

No new wilderness areas are recommended with this Plan Revision; however, boundary changes for Big Slough, Indian Mounds, and Upland Island Wilderness areas are recommended to improve management of these areas. The Revised Plan prescribes more precise management and protection for the Neches River Corridor than the 1987 Plan, and adds the Winters Bayou River segment as a candidate river. Both rivers meet eligibility guidelines for evaluation as National Wild and Scenic River candidates. The Revised Plan incorporates management area direction and standards for both special areas.

Determination of mineral lease availability and identification of protection clauses for leasable areas via 36 CFR 228.102:

The area available for mineral lease in the Revised Plan is 457,265 acres. This area, primarily oil and gas exploration, is very similar to the acreage identified in the 1987 Plan. The 1987 Plan identified 40,036 acres for leasing with no surface occupancy. The Revised Plan identifies 58,261 acres with this stipulation. Though this area is available for lease, no surface occupancy stipulations will protect special areas and key resource needs.

The above decisions are accompanied by the necessary supporting NEPA analysis and disclosure required by law and regulation. Management actions resulting from these decisions will be monitored during Plan implementation. If data or information changes, these decisions may be reassessed; however, these decisions are not expected to be routinely revisited during site-specific analysis.

Other Decisions & Relationship to Other Documents

The FEIS incorporates standards and guidelines and tiers to the environmental analysis from the following three Regional programmatic decisions, which can be reviewed at the Forest Supervisor's office:

1. The Final EIS and Record of Decision for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle (SPB EIS) dated April 6, 1987, as amended.

Plain/Piedmont dated February 27, 1989, as amended.

3.The Final EIS and Record of Decision for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on the National Forests in the Southern Region (RCW EIS) dated June 21, 1995.

Through the course of reviewing the SPB EIS it was determined that some standards and guidelines needed to be expanded to include new knowledge and information obtained since the document was published.

The following standards and guidelines from the SPB EIS were not incorporated, but they were replaced by Plan Forest-wide (FW) or Management Area (MA) Standards and Guidelines identified below.

SPB EIS #1 identified the need to use pest management to reduce timber losses. The Revised Plan FW Standards 071 and 072 expand and clarify the SPB standard to explain the use of a decision key in reducing losses; what primary diseases affect NFGT timber; and the need for prompt, well-defined actions to reduce these threats to NFGT timber resources.

SPB EIS #3 directed actions to control SPB losses near RCW clusters. This standard was clarified through FW standards, and standards within Management Area 2 (MA-2-80-3.3.7) that direct eight guidelines for SPB risk reduction, suppression, and management within RCW habitat management areas.

SPB EIS #6 described precautionary measures for prescribed burning. This general direction was clarified by four FW Standards 001 through 004 that specified coordination, agency policy, and conformity to Texas Air Quality Implementation Plan regulations in any prescribed fire action.

SPB EIS #7 provided guidance for scenic resource protection in any SPB control action. FW Standard 185 clarified this generic direction through a standard and guideline, and a visual quality matrix giving the appropriate scenery considerations for designated visual quality objective areas. The matrix gives specific management actions within these areas.

SPB EIS #8 generally directed management actions similar to wilderness to be used for other special areas. FW Standards 071 through 076 clarified that direction, and further defined modification to integrated pest management actions for each management area to ensure that objectives of each area were met.

SPB EIS #10 stated a retention for selected hardwoods for wildlife and plant diversity. FW standards for biological diversity, silviculture, and wildlife clarify this general need in terms of the tree species considered (via an Ecological Classification System), the wildlife species of concern such as RCW, or desired future condition of each specific management area.

SPB EIS - Wilderness Standards #1 through 7 were replaced and clarified through descriptions of the wilderness Management Area (MA-7), its desired condition, and management emphasis. The standards within MA-7 related to SPB actions were specified in MA-7 Standards 051 through 062.

around wilderness areas that may affect high-valued NFGT land or privately owned lands. This standard was clarified through MA-7 Standards 055 through 057 to ensure sufficient detection, monitoring, and actions are in place to protect adjacent lands from damage due to SPB.

SPB EIS - General Forest #4 identifies the need to consider cultural resource protection in any SPB control action. FW Standards 041 through 046 clarify the needs for any cultural resource during management actions, including SPB control, and incorporate additional considerations for cultural resources as described in the NFGT Heritage Management Plan.

Through the course of reviewing the VEG EIS it was determined that some standards and guidelines needed to be expanded to include new knowledge and information obtained since the document was published.

The following standards and guidelines from the VEG EIS were not incorporated, but they were replaced by Plan Forest-wide (FW) or Management Area (MA) Standards and Guidelines identified below.

VEG EIS #1 identifies and explains the need for site-specific analysis in any vegetation management action. Revised Plan Chapters IV and V describe two levels of decisionmaking, specifically the NFGT Revised Plan and site-specific projects analysis. FW Standard 131 clarifies these specific needs and cites VEG EIS Standard #1.

VEG EIS #2 relates to threatened and endangered species and communities and their evaluation during vegetation management projects. This direction is clarified for NFGT through FW Standard 025.

VEG EIS #3 directs integrated pest management principles be applied during site-specific projects. These concerns are addressed in a more complete format within FW Standards 071 through 077 for integrated pest management actions.

VEG EIS #4, #10, and #51 direct protection for soil and water through best management practices. The Revised Plan provides a detailed list of standards that clarify VEG EIS #4 for the NFGT. FW Standards 211 through 218 and Management Area 4 (Streamside Management Zones) provide protection standards, as well as goals, objectives, desired future condition, and management emphasis for streams throughout the NFGT.

VEG EIS #11 and #12 direct a process for site-specific evaluation of project impacts on cultural resources. This direction is superseded by FW Standards 041 through 046 that direct the process for heritage resources and how it is implemented through the NFGT Heritage Management Plan and programmatic agreement with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

VEG EIS #14 and #15 direct vegetation management actions to consider and be in concert with visual quality objectives. The Revised Plan FW Standards and Guidelines for scenic resources (FW-185) provide specific direction for each management action within all visually sensitive areas. This is further clarified within each management area with appropriate scenic resource standards for that area.

including retention of snags and hardwood clumps. This direction is clarified in FW Standards and Guidelines for biological diversity, silviculture, and wildlife. Direction in the Revised Plan utilizes an ecological classification system to help define areas and species appropriate to those areas. The standards direct snag retention, special habitat or species considerations, and habitat objectives within each management area and on a NFGT-wide basis using the Management Indicator Species concept (Revised Plan Chapter V).

VEG EIS #31, #36, and #48 refer to burning applications and site preparation that do not apply to NFGT Revised Plan direction. These are not incorporated.

VEG EIS #5 lists regional stocking standards for various tree species during regeneration. FW Standard 204-1 has modified this recommended stocking table for NFGT species and desired density levels.

VEG EIS #28 states specific guides for prescribed fire application in certain pine stands. The Revised Plan has clarified this direction for appropriate use on the NFGT in FW Standard 063-2.

All standards and guidelines were incorporated from the Regional RCW Strategy except for references to regeneration and management of Virginia Pine (RCW EIS Table A-5 and 4.8.8). References to Virginia Pine were deleted. The area affected by the district court orders of June 17 and October 20, 1988, will remain in effect unless and until the outcome of litigation allows implementation of the Regional RCW Strategy.

In compliance with 36 CFR 219.16, the Revised Plan includes certain scheduled activities. These proposed activities are displayed in the Revised Plan Appendices C and E and are merely estimates. Whether decisions are made to go forward with these proposed projects is dependent upon a number of factors including budget and human resources that may affect projected actions. Each proposed project is decided upon through a site-specific NEPA analysis.

Changes in Decisions from the DEIS

Based on public review and comment on the Draft Plan and EIS, Alternative 8 in the FEIS is a modification of the Preferred Alternative (4B) identified in the DEIS. These modifications include:

> Direction and standards and guidelines that provide identification, protection, and restoration of a 50-foot primary zone and a variable secondary zone beyond the primary zone of streamside management in MA-4.
>
> More descriptive direction for managing old growth in MA-4 and in other management areas to include clarification for SPB control actions.
>
> Increased emphasis for longleaf pine restoration and Texas Natural Heritage sites, including the designation of Longleaf Ridge Special Management Area (MA-6).
>
> ORV and OHV direction to clarify areas on the Sabine, Davy Crockett, and northern Angelina National Forests as open to ORV and OHV use; restricted ORV use to trails in MA-1 and MA-2 on the Sam Houston National Forest and all of MA-4 and 6 (Longleaf Ridge); closed ORV use in MA-3, 7, and 8; and restrictions outside of normal administrative activities in Management Areas 9, 10, and 11.

Land allocations for Big Creek Scenic Area from the proposed 5,000 acres to approximately 1,920 acres; an increase of 210 acres to Winters Bayou Scenic Area; Beech Ravines and Colorow Creek Botanical designations were changed from Botanical Areas to Scenic Areas; and Texas Natural Heritage Areas designated as MA-8d (if not within other special designations).

Special area clarification providing direct information for old-growth allocations and special management concerns.

Management and protection clarification, as well as study responsibility for the Neches River and Winters Bayou segments, which meet eligibility guidelines for evaluation as National Wild and Scenic River candidates.

Fewer acres allocated toward RCW management than in the Draft EIS and Plan to allow more flexible management for ecosystem restoration within the area allocated as Upland Forest Ecosystem (MA-1); and a greater opportunity for timber production and higher ASQ

is allowed which addresses concerns in Senate Resolution 285, a resolution approved by the U.S. Senate in 1994 to specifically reduce impacts on local economies by related Forest Plan decisions. An evaluation of economic impacts of proposed management activities is provided in the FEIS.

The addition of Biodiversity and Wildlife Standards and Guidelines to address the issues of fragmentation, neotropical migratory birds, and old growth.

The addition of Aquatic Resources, and Soil and Water Standards and Guidelines to ensure clear guidance for clean water and associated aquatic species; adjustments to Recreation and Trails Management Standards and Guidelines to define ORV and multi-use trail areas; and management direction for all trails.

Many other standards and guidelines in the Draft Plan modified for clarity of intent in response to public comments.

Section III - Rationale for Decision

Background

It is evident from the disclosures in the FEIS that Alternative 8 (the Revised Plan) will not create the least impact on the environment, nor can it generate as many market-valued commodities as other alternatives considered in the FEIS. However, I believe the Selected Alternative (Alternative 8) achieves a balance for economic benefits, environmental issues, and concerns voiced by the public. Most importantly, I am confident the management proposed in the Revised Plan is within the physical and biological capability of the land and can be accomplished without reducing that capability, or negatively affecting the socio-economic conditions of the area.

Many divergent opinions were considered in the development and selection of this Revised Plan. Considered individually, these opinions and the proposed goals and objectives for the Forests and Grasslands are highly desirable. However, when considered simultaneously and with keeping resource capabilities in mind, it would be impossible to meet all requests and desires in any one alternative. Considering the range and intensity of concerns expressed by the public on various

resources available.

I first approached my decision by reviewing the major issues, the public's comments on these issues, and secondly how the various alternatives responded to these issues. I present my rationale for these decisions in the same manner below. My decision to select Alternative 8 in the FEIS as the Revised Plan is based on my assessment that Alternative 8 best maximizes net public benefits. It provides a high level of diverse benefits, and is highly responsive to public issues. Numerous considerations have had a bearing on my decision regarding multiple-use of the NFGT. In part, they include effects on local communities, endangered species management, and long-term multiple-use sustainability of all resources. Most importantly, Selected Alternative 8 maximizes high net public benefits through:

Providing a continued timber program, maintaining economic and community stability, while sustaining the many natural resources;

Protecting and actively managing special areas to enhance their cultural and natural resource attributes;

Establishing RCW habitat management areas (HMA), larger than described in the Regional RCW Strategy, to allow expansion of the population that will occur through active management;

Providing for continued recreation, including ORV's, while protecting other resources; and

Directing long-term restoration of the longleaf and shortleaf pine ecosystems, that provides both natural and economic benefits.

No single factor or individual consideration predominates my decision. Alternative 8 provides resource protection, as well as a long-term sustained yield of goods and services which were both requested by many publics. I reviewed the environmental consequences of the Selected Alternative 8 and the other alternatives. The Revised Plan complies with all legal requirements applicable to the Forests and Grasslands.

The following discussion by issue showing how the selected alternative deals with those issues that arose during development of the Revised Plan provides further rationale for my decision. No new issues were identified after the Draft EIS and Draft Plan were made available for review identifying Alternative 4b as the Preferred Alternative; however, because of comments on those draft documents, changes were made in land allocations, direction, and standards and guidelines to design the Selected Alternative 8.

1.The **BIODIVERSITY** issue deals with maintaining the appropriate natural mix of plant and animal species on the NFGT. The concerns include topics like: native versus exotic species; management indicators; old growth; unique, rare, or special ecosystems; ecosystem management; and species diversity.

Alternative 8 provides direction to manage for native or desirable non-native plant and animal species, communities, and ecosystems on the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas.

A detailed Ecological Classification System (ECS) defines biological and physical characteristics used to assist and prescribe direction for land management practices. This system provides background information to base decisions on during future Revised Plan implementation. The ECS relationship is found in overall Revised Plan direction, desired future conditions, and management area standards and guidelines.

Management direction for non-native or exotic plants and animals is dealt with through specific standards and guidelines regulating management of and for both desirable native and non-native species. Examples of this include:

-Stocking trout in lakes during the cool months for additional fishing opportunities. This stocking has no adverse effect on native fish and they become prey to native fish during the summer season.

-Replacing the non-native slash pine with longleaf pine or other native species.

-Enhancing the RCW habitat through establishment of, over a reasonable time, longleaf and shortleaf pine where loblolly pine currently exists.

-A gradual change from existing non-native bermuda and lovegrass pasture on the Grasslands to native prairie grasses.

Alternative 8 provides the opportunity for the protection and management of old growth while maintaining a reasonable amount of timber harvest for community stability. Old-growth components are described in each major resource management area and developed in detail through descriptions in the EIS. (See EIS Appendix I). Alternative 8 provides for about 150,000 acres of potential old growth compared to about 35,000 acres in the 1987 Plan. This contrasts with Alternatives 6 and 7 that have about 240,000 potential old-growth acres.

Alternative 8 provides more specific management requirements for riparian areas, wetlands, and other ecosystems than the 1987 Plan. Riparian areas in the 1987 Plan included about 34,000 acres. Alternative 8 provides about 49,000 acres of streamside and lakeside riparian acres comprised of a 50-foot primary zone from the water's edge and a variable secondary riparian zone to the extent of the riparian induced vegetation.

In addition to the riparian areas mentioned above, about 2,300 acres are established as special bottomland areas to provide opportunities to maintain and enhance biodiversity. These were not defined as special ecosystems in the 1987 Plan.

Alternative 8 includes a significantly expanded species listings and use of management indicators for determining management activities' effects. The management indicator concept has been expanded to species and communities to be monitored through a variety of activities. These indicators will be used to gauge management's efforts to restore and manage the plant and animal communities (described in EIS Appendices F and H); endangered, threatened, and sensitive species population improvements; as well as traditional species that provide a wide-range of recreational and commercial benefits.

2.The **VEGETATION MANIPULATION** issue deals with silvicultural systems, methods and tools used to manage vegetation on the NFGT. This includes the topics of prescribed fire,

treatments. This issue also includes concerns about management of mixed pine and hardwood forests.

Alternative 8 includes an enhanced prescribed burning program that is based on the needs for fire management, wildlife habitat improvement, range improvement, and timber management; and is more closely tied to ecosystem maintenance and restoration of fire-dependent ecosystems.

Specific standards and guidelines for prescribed fire are found in management areas and forest-wide direction; and use of fire in wildernesses is provided with the development of burning plans that would amplify the natural fire processes that have not been allowed to develop since establishment.

In the Revised Plan, all harvest methods under even-aged, uneven-aged and two-aged silvicultural systems are available. The determination of which harvest method and where to use it will be based on a site-specific analysis. Uneven-aged and two-aged systems will generally be used in the visually sensitive areas such as corridors along roads, lakes, and trails. The 1987 Plan required even-aged harvest methods on suitable lands. Sixty percent of the regeneration was to be clearcut and 40 percent was to be seed-tree or shelterwood.

Management type determinations will be guided by the ECS. These include pine-hardwood mixed species not recognized as management types in the 1987 Plan.

3.The **SPECIAL MANAGEMENT AREAS** issue covers concerns about wilderness management and allocations, scenic area designations, wild and scenic river corridors' protection, research natural areas establishment, and other special corridors management and protection.

Special management areas help to identify and recognize unique areas within the Forests and Grasslands. Some areas identified in Alternative 8 are also identified in the 1987 Plan; however, most of these have been expanded and/or enhanced by additional guidelines to satisfy many of the issues and concerns raised by the public. New areas that meet characteristics for designation have also been added to special area management. Special area acres increased from about 4,000 acres to about 15,000 acres, excluding wilderness, in Alt. 8.

Formal evaluation of seven proposed research natural areas (EIS Appendix G) resulted in retaining the Crosstimbers RNA and recommending Mill Creek Cove on the Sabine National Forest as a 225-acre RNA This was a 94-acre scenic area in the 1987 Plan.

Winters Bayou is added as a candidate wild and scenic river corridor. This and the existing Neches River Corridor include about 1,200 acres in this protected corridor status.

Scenic areas in the 1987 Plan included Big Creek, Colorow Creek, Mill Creek Cove, Winters Bayou, and Beech Ravines. Acres were added to all of these scenic areas and Mill Creek Cove will become a RNA.

The exemplary plant communities, identified by the Texas Natural Heritage Program, will be managed and protected as described in Management Area 8d or as inclusions in management areas where they are located. Longleaf Ridge Special Area (MA-6) was developed to especially address an area with several of these Natural Heritage Program sites.

management of ORV trails and open areas on the forest. The NFGT provides the most significant public ORV recreation opportunities. Strong concerns surfaced over conflicts with other users and RCW management, safety considerations, and environmental damage. Forest areas where the ORV demand is greatest are also the areas with the highest RCW concentrations and the highest demand from other recreationists.

ORV use is recognized as a legitimate use of the National Forests; however, this use must be managed so as not to harm resource values nor create unreasonable conflicts with other users. Alternative 8 provides for 355 miles of designated ORV trails on the Sam Houston Forest and the southern part of the Angelina Forest. Open areas remain on the Davy Crockett, Sabine, and northern Angelina National Forests. The restriction of ORV use to designated trails on the Sam Houston and southern Angelina is needed to minimize conflicts with RCW habitat requirements and to prevent adverse soil and water impacts.

The Grasslands are closed to ORV use to prevent conflicts with cattle grazing allotments, recreation uses, and soil and water impacts.

5.The **RCW** issue covers concerns about the endangered RCW and related management on the NFGT to assure population recovery and stability. Concerns included how much land area should be devoted to RCW habitat for recovery; the best silvicultural treatments; and foraging area needs. Litigation concerning this issue precipitated this Revision effort.

Direction within Management Area 2 (MA-2) will provide the opportunity to greatly expand habitat conducive for species like the RCW. The Forest conditions created by this management strategy will also provide an ecological condition for a variety of wildlife and plant species to include threatened and endangered (T&E).

Litigation is not resolved on moving from the court-ordered 1,200-meter management areas to the guidelines prescribed by the Regional RCW Strategy. Those areas will remain unless and until the court lifts its order; however, the management of areas in MA-2 and 6 not affected by the court order will be implemented according to the Regional RCW Strategy.

Alternative 8 adds about 107,000 acres of forest lands to RCW habitat emphasis over the 1987 Plan and Comprehensive Plan resulting from the court's orders.

Alternatives 4 and 4b considered more areas for RCW habitat emphasis; however, Alternative 8 provides the best level between the RCW needs and the need to manage and restore ecosystems for future opportunities in RCW habitat and to provide timber supplies.

6.The **INTEGRATED PEST MANAGEMENT** issue deals with other pests, but the primary concern is for prevention and control of the southern pine beetle (SPB). Options and circumstances under which treatments may be implemented for SPB control and treatment were made in the Record of Decision for the Southern Pine Beetle Environmental Impact Statement (SPB EIS) and was excluded from the scope of the Revision. Concerns also dealt with considering preventive management techniques and how to deal with SPB in special management areas.

pine are more resistant to SPB infestations and over time there should be less damage to forests by the SPB.

Additional guidelines in Alternative 8 clarified direction from the SPB EIS for controlling SPB outbreaks in special management areas, wilderness, and other places enhance the opportunity to prevent damage to private timber and other high value private lands or National Forests.

Alternative 8 also allows for more aggressive use of prescribed fire to control fuel buildup and keep diseases at lower levels.

7.The **ROADS AND TRAILS** issue includes concerns for road and trail quantities, access needs, maintenance needs, closures or obliterations, traffic management, and roadside or trailside management. Protection of adjacent areas from SPB control activities were of interest to the public, as well as resolution of conflicting uses of trails.

Roads are an important facility for access to manage resources within the Forests and Grasslands. Many roads, through public lands, also provide access to private property and these must be maintained and reconstructed for basic access needs. Many roads through the forest are either county or state roads maintained by those governments.

Alternative 8 maintenance and reconstruction needs apply to only those roads the Forest Service will manage for resource needs and uses. This alternative provides a reasonable level of maintenance, reconstruction, temporary and permanent closure, and use management.

Temporary or permanent closures will occur when weather conditions would allow use to cause unacceptable damage, undue wildlife disturbance, or for reducing littering and man-caused fire occurrences.

Roadside and trailside zones have been given more guidelines for maintaining visual qualities than was provided in the 1987 Plan. National Recreation Trails, 4-C and Lone Star, will have a zone established where management will be applied that promotes scenic quality of the trailside zone.

8.The **COMMUNITY STABILITY** issue is of great importance to neighbors of the NFGT lands and local communities because the NFGT management activities affect these surrounding areas. Management of these lands can significantly affect local economies and county budgets for roads and schools by the amount of money returned to counties.

Alternative 8 does not give the highest opportunity to provide returns to counties for roads and schools, but it maintains approximately the same level of timber outputs as the 1987 Plan. This is sufficient to maintain current job levels in timber related businesses and cattle grazing. Recreation uses should continue to increase. This will bring users into towns and communities where they will buy goods and services.

Oil and gas exploration and development is accommodated at existing levels and this activity should also help maintain community stability.

9.The **WILDLIFE AND FISHERIES** issue encompasses wildlife management for game, non-game, threatened, endangered, rare or sensitive (excluding RCW), extirpated, and introduced wildlife species, as well as aquatic resource management. The wildlife and fisheries

recreationists from many parts of the country.

Alternative 8 management strategy considers the many sensitive and protected species including existing, extirpated, and exemplary communities. It provides monitoring guidance for management indicators, plants, animals, and other sensitive species, including a strategy for fisheries inventory and management on lakes, streams, and ponds.

It also incorporates direction for at least 57 species of threatened, endangered, and sensitive species; in contrast to 3 species addressed in the 1987 Plan.

Game species are expected to increase with additional cooperative efforts with Texas Parks and Wildlife on habitat management emphasis. Wild turkey have been reintroduced to the forests and should have huntable populations in the near future.

The emphasis on maintaining a significant amount of hardwood within pine stands, pine-hardwood forest types, streamside zones, and hardwood bottomlands will provide an excellent component for big and small game species.

Threatened and endangered species with the exception of RCW (Issue 5), comprise a variety of less common species. These species should benefit from the ecological management approach and management indicators objectives that promote adequate natural habitat forest wide. Management indicators, as described by habitat group, will provide emphasis to move toward population recovery of these species.

10. The **RECREATION** issue includes developed recreation site management, dispersed recreation, hiking, hunting, visual quality, and interpretive services. Other concerns included in this issue are cultural resource management and law enforcement.

Alternative 8 provides facility and improvement opportunities for meaningful recreation experiences at appropriate levels of accessibility consistent with resource protection needs and anticipated user demands. Fishing opportunities are provided in all suitable ponds, lakes, and streams. Information and interpretive facilities, campgrounds, picnic areas, visitor centers, boat ramps, and swimming areas are to be provided with this alternative. This does not differ significantly from the 1987 Plan; however, Alternative 8 provides for a procedural analysis and assessment to guide

repairs, closures, reconstruction, or modification of existing site problem areas, such as those with shoreline erosion.

The strategy in Alternative 8 is designed to reduce conflicts between hunters and other users through certain standards and management area allocations; better monitoring of hunting and other recreational activities to define potential overuse, indiscriminate shooting, and other violations.

It also directs a cultural inventory program to ensure compliance with the Heritage Program Agreement and Heritage Resource Management.

11. The **RESOURCE SUSTAINABILITY** issue deals with concerns for clean water and air, maintaining long-term soil productivity, maintaining a continuous supply of forage and timber, ensuring that goods and services are produced within the capability of the land, and providing commodity and non-commodity goods and services for public use.

All alternatives were designed to achieve resource sustainability as the Forest Service's mission of multiple use and sustained yield. Alternative 8, however, provides many additional standards and guidelines, beyond those provided in the 1987 Plan, to better protect soil productivity, water and air quality, and a sustained yield of timber supply, forage for cattle and wildlife, wildlife habitat, recreation and aesthetic values, and minerals. Those standards and guidelines are defined for management activities occurring in each mgmt. area.

Some of those standards and guidelines include specific ways to do fireline construction and reconstruction, ORV trail crossings at streams, watershed improvement methods, monitoring for range condition and analysis, season of grazing, and management for non-native and native range forage species.

Direction is also provided to ensure sustainable timber harvest levels from a reassessment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) and timber sale program levels.

12. The **MIX OF GOODS AND SERVICES** issue deals with successes and problems in implementing the 1987 Plan and on differences concerning what is considered to be the appropriate mix of sometimes competing goods and services. Balanced management between the various resources is also a concern.

A balance of multiple uses is provided within all alternatives of the Revised Plan in an attempt to respond to the varying demands of many publics, both rural and urban. Changes can be found in the Revised Plan so that the desired future condition of the Forests, Grasslands, and each management area are more fully described. Clarification of management intent and direction is provided.

13. The **PLANNING** issue deals with monitoring and evaluation of activities and the process used to analyze various resources and tradeoffs between management intensity levels.

The Revised Plan identifies standards and guidelines for forest-wide use and for each management area. Standards are a formal management commitment and can only be changed during Plan implementation with an amendment. Guidelines are provided as general direction and have some latitude for deviation at the project level. Sometimes they list specific exceptions or circumstances. Standards and guidelines are used to achieve the multiple-use sustainability, and ultimately the long-term productivity of the Forests and Grasslands.

The Revised Plan Chapter V provides more detailed monitoring and evaluation of activities and for social and economic impacts during implementation. It also provides direction for more research

into aquatic systems, biodiversity, and the historical vegetation found on the NFGT. Identification of research needs, as directed in Alternative 8, benefits the implementation of this Revised Plan and ecosystem management; two major changes compared to the 1987 Plan.

14. The **MINERALS** issue deals with what type of minerals exploration and development decisions are being made and the impacts of these decisions on the production of oil and gas resources. These are important because they contribute revenue for the Federal Treasury and local governments.

minerals issue. Budgets and output projections reflecting current trends and projected demand were described in the FEIS, and this information was used to develop direction in the Revised Plan.

Specific descriptions of the minerals resource, minerals exploration, and development are provided in the FEIS which was used to establish clearer Revised Plan direction. New standards have been added to mitigate impacts to wildlife habitat, streams, and other resources from oil and gas development. Additional requirements and guidance are provided for testing residues in reserve pits and for erosion control.

Management direction ensuring all sensitive species, not just RCW, protection in areas affected by mineral activities is contained in the Revised Plan. Additional guidelines are given for reclamation and revegetation activities (see FEIS Appendix B).

Standards and guidelines for minerals exploration and development in wilderness areas to meet legal rights of private landowners are addressed; and leasing decisions for minerals and special stipulations, if any, for these leases are located within each management area.

Permits for iron-ore gravel removal is prohibited in the Revised Plan as opposed to the 1987 Plan which allowed the removal of iron-ore gravel under special policy provisions.

Alternative 8 does provide significant returns to local communities and jobs related to the oil and gas industry.

15. The **LANDS** issue deals with the topics of special use permit management, rights-of-way, land purchases and exchanges, and property boundary management.

Few changes were made in the Revised Plan when compared to the 1987 Plan; however, more specific direction for prioritizing landownership adjustments and new rights-of-ways objectives are included for trails.

There is a need to make some boundary changes to wilderness areas as a result of land ownership changes and/or exchanges. These changes to Indian Mounds, Upland Island, and Big Slough would require recommendations to Congress for legislation to modify the boundaries. Recommendations will be forwarded after approval of the ROD.

All other areas of the lands program do not vary significantly between alternatives in the Revised Plan.

Section IV - Alternatives

Introduction

The following discussions of alternatives summarize important factors which I considered and explain why I believe Alternative 8, as described in the FEIS, will maximize net public benefits when compared to the other alternatives.

Alternatives were developed through involvement by Southern Regional Office and NFGT employees, other agencies, public groups, and individuals.

Each of the ten alternatives examined in detail in the FEIS has an associated map displaying the allocation of different portions of the NFGT to management areas. A management area (MA) is a land unit of the NFGT having similar suitability, capability, and values where compatible management prescriptions are applied. Eleven major land allocations were developed into MA's and used in the application to the ten alternatives. These MA's have prescriptions or management activities developed that are compatible to its management objectives. Management areas used in each alternative are:

MA-1 - Upland Forest Ecosystems
MA-2 - Red-cockaded Woodpecker Emphasis
MA-3 - Grassland Ecosystems
MA-4 - Streamside Management Zones
MA-5 - Major Aquatic Ecosystems
MA-6 - Longleaf Ridge Special Area
MA-7 - Wilderness
MA-8a - Research Natural Areas
MA-8b - Protected River and Stream Corridors
MA-8c - Scenic Areas
MA-8d - Natural Heritage Areas
MA-8e - Special Bottomland Areas
MA-8f - Cultural Heritage Areas
MA-9a - Developed Recreation Sites
MA-9b - Minimally Developed Recreation Sites
MA-10a - Administrative Use Sites
MA-10b - Special Use Permit Sites
MA-11 - SFA Experiment Forest

Management areas were defined first by using the ecological classification for the NFGT areas and secondarily by special values, legislative or administrative designations, and cultural features.

The Selected Alternative

Alternative 8 is the Forest Service's selected alternative from ten in the FEIS. The selected alternative for managing the Forests and Grasslands is defined as being the one maximizing net public benefits and that best accomplishes the mission of the Forest Service. The Selected Alternative 8 accommodates a variety of uses and values that the public demands; it sustains these uses and values for future generations; and it does this in an economically efficient and environmentally sound manner. This Alternative 8, with decisions identified in Section II of this ROD, is the Revised Plan.

Alternatives Considered

Ten alternatives were analyzed in detail by the Interdisciplinary (ID) Team and Management Team. They included Alternatives 1, 2, 3, 4, 4a, 4b, 5, 6, and 7 considered in the DEIS and Alternative 8, developed in response to public comments on the DEIS and Draft Plan. Although Alternative 8

alternative to reflect different means of issue resolution proposed during public review of the DEIS. Another alternative, not considered in detail, was developed to respond to public input to include 17 percent of the forests into wilderness designation. The ID Team concluded that to propose 17 percent of the forests in wilderness would seriously limit the opportunity to provide adequate suitable habitat for the RCW. Analysis and environmental consequences of all ten alternatives are presented in Chapters II and III, and Appendix B of the FEIS.

Description of the Various Alternatives

The following discussion of alternatives summarizes the comparison of management strategies that could be used to manage the NFGT.

Alternative 1 implements the court-ordered management for 1,200-meter zones for active and inactive red-cockaded woodpecker (RCW) clusters. Alternatives 2 through 8 implement direction for RCW habitat management found in the Final EIS and ROD for the Management of the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker and Its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region dated June 21, 1995. However, all alternatives retain the 1,200-meter circle management zones until and unless the court allows the NFGT to use the Regional RCW Strategy for those areas.

Note: Management Area allocation percentages in the following are approximate only, and may not total exactly 100 percent due to rounding differences.

Alternative 1 is the no-action or current prescription alternative. The court-ordered management for 1,200-meter zones for active and inactive RCW clusters is implemented on approximately 174,000 acres of National Forests. The remaining forested land is managed under the 1987 Plan, as amended. Even-aged timber management is the preferred prescription; however, clearcutting has been less than the 1987 projections. Uneven-aged management is used in some areas to meet site-specific prescriptions. Most of the four Forests are open to off-road vehicle (ORV) use on and off designated trails. Five wilderness areas, five scenic areas, and one wild and scenic river corridor are managed for protection of these special site values.

The Grasslands employ a variety of range and wildlife management practices to produce forage and improve range conditions. The existing Cross Timbers Research Natural Area (RNA) is managed to preserve its natural characteristics.

Alternative 2 emphasizes approximately 35 percent in MA-2 (Upland Forests Ecosystems) to provide habitat needs essential to ensure RCW population recovery and stability. This alternative has the minimum RCW Habitat Management Area (HMA) as identified in the Regional RCW Strategy and incorporates the standards and guidelines from it.

Forested areas not in MA-2 would be under current management, with the following exceptions:

*Old Aldridge Sawmill site is designated as a special area;
*Streamside management zones (MA-4) extend to the limit of the floodplain soil; and
*Ecological classification inventories are used to determine timber management activities to restore longleaf and shortleaf pine communities.

grazing is emphasized, and oil or gas production is continued with availability and potential for development; the second highest of all alternatives.

Land available on the Forests and Grasslands for lease without any surface occupancy restrictions or stipulations are about 401,600 acres.

Alternative 3 emphasizes moderate to high levels of commodities. Approximately 35 percent is managed for the RCW (MA-2). Outside MA-2, the forests are managed to produce moderate to high levels of commodities, and low to moderate levels of amenities. Ecological classification inventories are used to determine management type and activities to restore longleaf and shortleaf pine communities. This alternative has two research natural areas, three scenic areas, four botanical areas, three historical areas, six bottomland areas, five wilderness areas, and one wild and scenic river corridor.

The Sam Houston National Forest and southern Angelina National Forest are closed to ORV travel, except on designated trails. The other forests remain open to ORV travel.

Acres available for mineral leasing are about 398,500 acres. Additional leasing opportunities are available on 58,200 acres with no surface occupancy stipulations. The Grasslands continue to be managed with a commodity output emphasis.

Alternative 4 emphasizes maximum RCW habitat. MA-2 includes 73 percent of forest lands with the exception of five existing wilderness areas, two research natural areas, two scenic, three historic, four botanical, five special bottomland areas, and two wild and scenic river corridors. Approximately 13,500 acres in MA-1 on the Sabine National Forest and MA-3 on the Grasslands comprise the rest of the management strategy. Longleaf pine harvest rotation is extended to 100 years in MA-1.

Developed recreation opportunities are emphasized. ORV travel is only allowed on designated trails in the southern Angelina and Sam Houston National Forests, and LBJ Grassland. The Davy Crockett and Sabine National Forests are open for ORV use.

Mineral leasing is available on about 400,000 acres, with additional acres available with no surface occupancy.

The Grasslands are managed for a mix of amenity and commodity outputs with opportunities for developed recreation, wildlife, and other recreation values. Non-native pastures which once constituted about one-fifth of the Grasslands will be replaced with native little bluestem, Indiangrass, and switchgrass prairie.

Alternative 4a emphasizes moderate to high levels of commodities and amenities with management allocations similar to Alternative 3. Wilderness and special area allocations are the same as Alternative 4.

ORV travel is only allowed on designated trails in the southern Angelina and Sam Houston National Forests and the LBJ Grasslands. The Davy Crockett, northern Angelina, and Sabine National Forests are open to ORV use.

pine will be extended to 100 years. Ecological classification inventories are used to determine management type activities to restore longleaf and shortleaf pine communities.

The Caddo and LBJ Grasslands are managed the same as in Alternative 4. Special management areas are the same as in Alternative 4.

Alternative 4b emphasizes corridors managed with MA-2 guidelines between RCW HMA's to consolidate and connect isolated sub-populations by providing habitat corridors. The entire Sam Houston National Forest is designated MA-2 HMA for the RCW.

Developed and dispersed recreational opportunities, Grasslands management, minerals production activities, timber management prescriptions, and special areas are the same as in Alternative 4 and 4a.

ORV travel is not permitted on the southern Angelina National Forest. ORV travel is allowed only on designated trails on the Sam Houston National Forest. Other Forests are open to ORV use.

Mineral leasing is available with surface occupancy on about 400,000 acres, and additional acres would be available with no surface occupancy.

Alternative 5 emphasizes protection and management for natural values. Approximately 38 percent of the forest is habitat for the RCW. There are five existing wilderness areas, two proposed wilderness areas, two research natural areas, one scenic area, seven botanical areas, three historic areas, ten bottomland areas, and three wild and scenic corridors.

Stream corridors wider than those proposed in other alternatives are established to maintain and enhance water quality and to enhance populations of wildlife using these areas. Single tree selection is a commonly used silvicultural system. Developed recreational opportunities are emphasized. ORV travel is not permitted except on designated trails on the southern Angelina and Sam Houston National Forests. The Grasslands are closed to ORV use, but the Davy Crockett and Sabine would be open.

Minerals availability is reduced due to no lease options on the Grasslands, but about 358,350 acres are available elsewhere. Lands with no surface occupancy stipulations are applied to about 63,200 acres.

The Grasslands are managed for a vegetation mosaic de-emphasizing livestock grazing opportunities. Management for recreation, wildlife, and other amenity values are emphasized. Woodland and grassland sites with natural heritage qualities would be added to existing sites to preserve their special qualities.

Alternative 6 emphasizes uneven-aged management using no herbicides. Uneven-aged management, primarily single-tree selection, is used forest-wide to maintain tall forest cover and provide regeneration. Prescribed burning is rarely used. Herbicides are not permitted.

This alternative has five existing wilderness areas, seven proposed wildernesses, seven bottomland areas, four research natural areas, one scenic, two botanical areas, two historic areas, and four wild and scenic river corridors. Late successional plant communities are common in the wide stream

aesthetics and wildlife habitat connecting wilderness and other special management areas.

Developed and dispersed recreational opportunities are similar to Alternative 5. No lands are available for mineral leasing on either the Grasslands or the Forests.

The Grasslands are managed primarily for livestock grazing, wildlife, recreation, and protection of high quality examples of native plant communities. Most non-native pasture (approximately one-fifth of the Grasslands) will be restored to native grasses. Several additional sites are managed to preserve special qualities.

Alternative 7 emphasizes uneven-aged management but allows herbicide uses. Single-tree selection and group selection are used forest-wide to maintain tall, large forest cover. Herbicides are used on hardwoods to ensure pine regeneration. Prescribed burning is seldom used except in longleaf pine stands. This alternative is very similar to Alternative 6 with the major differences being prescribed fire used for vegetation management, herbicide uses, and the Longleaf Ridge area allocated as a special management area.

Five existing wilderness areas, six proposed wildernesses, four research natural areas, one scenic area, two botanical areas, two historic areas, eight bottomland areas, and four wild and scenic river corridors make up about one-third of the land allocation. Late successional plant communities are common in wide stream corridors and trailside zones. These areas are preserved as old growth to provide aesthetics and wildlife habitat connecting wilderness and other special management areas.

Grasslands management and developed and dispersed recreational opportunities are very similar to Alternative 6. Minerals leasing is available on 317,053 acres, and an additional 104,460 acres are available with no surface occupancy stipulations.

Alternative 8 is the selected alternative developed as the Revised Plan and described more fully in Section II of this ROD. It emphasizes longleaf and shortleaf pine restoration and associated ecosystems, sustained timber harvests and RCW habitat. MA-1 and MA-2 comprises 32 percent and 37 percent of NFGT lands respectively. Five existing wilderness areas, two research natural areas, four scenic areas, three historic areas, numerous natural heritage sites, four bottomland areas, the Longleaf Ridge Special Management Area (MA-6), and two wild and scenic river corridors are also considered.

Developed recreational opportunities are emphasized. ORV travel is allowed only on designated trails in the southern Angelina National Forest and all of the Sam Houston National Forest. Other forest areas have open ORV use, but the Grasslands are closed to ORV use. Designated trails are established on the southern Angelina National Forest, including the Longleaf Ridge area, and on the Sam Houston National Forest through a transition process. The transition process includes trail inventory, evaluation, mitigation, and finally designation of those trails suitable for ORV use.

Minerals leasing availability is similar to Alternative 4b. The Grasslands are managed for a mix of amenity and commodity outputs. Opportunities for developed recreation, wildlife, and other recreation values are emphasized. Non-native pastures which once constituted about one-fifth of the Grasslands will be replaced with native little bluestem, Indiangrass, and switchgrass prairie. In addition to the existing Cross Timbers Research Natural Area, Mill Creek Cove is to be managed as a Research Natural Area on the Sabine National Forest.

Alternatives with Higher PNV

Present net value (PNV) calculations are required according to 36 CFR 219.12 (e)(f)(g)(h) and (j), and are used to measure economic efficiency of each alternative. PNV is the sum of priced benefits minus the sum of costs for the 150-year planning period, discounted to the present. However, PNV does not include all costs and benefits. Some of the more important nonpriced benefits include ecosystem diversity, habitat for threatened, endangered, or sensitive species, water quality, and scenic quality. Since PNV does not reflect the values of these benefits nor the costs associated with

negative effects on them, it was not the only criterion I used in selecting Alternative 8. PNV estimates for all alternatives in descending order are 1, 2, 3, 8, 4a, 4b, 4, 5, 7 and 6. All are detailed in the FEIS Appendix B.

Selected Alternative 8 has a PNV of $1,815 million. The following three alternatives have a higher PNV:

Alternative	PNV
1	$1,989 million
2	$1,940 million
3	$1,919 million

Alternative 1 has the highest PNV and the greatest number of acres scheduled for harvest in the first decade. Fewer acres are reserved for special management areas, old growth and other emphasis such as recreation. The increased amount of harvest also results in more adverse impacts or higher risk impacts over the next 10 years. Some of these impacts include fewer acres of remaining old growth, increased risk of adverse impacts to water quality in some watersheds, reduced visual quality except in areas immediately adjacent to major cross-Forest highways, and reduced habitat for wildlife including RCW.

Alternative 2 has the second highest PNV with effects similar to Alternative 1 because of its emphasis on timber production; the second most acres available for timber management of any alternative. Although more acres are protected as special interest areas and for nonmotorized recreation, they are significantly less than the Selected Alternative 8.

Alternative 3 has the third highest PNV, approximately 6 percent greater than the Selected Alternative 8. This is largely the result of harvest level and more acres in timber management than the Selected Alternative 8. Fewer special interest areas are designated than in Alternative 8.

The recreation benefits in Alternative 8 are provided across the entire spectrum of nonmotorized and motorized recreation. Therefore, overall recreation demands are better achieved by the diversity of opportunities provided in Alternative 8. Overall, Alternative 8 provides a greater diversity of recreation opportunities, protects more special interest areas, and maintains a higher quality of the forest resources than any of the alternatives with a higher PNV.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

All alternatives considered in detail meet legal and environmental standards. A detailed discussion of the environmental effects of each alternative is included in Chapter III of the FEIS. The

and biological environment of the Forests and Grasslands.

Alternative 6 is the environmentally preferred alternative since it involves the least human-induced change to the natural environment. Environmental protection would be the dominant concern under this alternative.

An alternative comparison of some environmental, economic, and physical differences between Alternative 6 and Alternative 8 (Selected Alternative), and other alternatives is as follows:

> The alternatives with the least amount of forest land identified as suitable for timber production includes: Alternatives 6 and 7 with approximately 388,000 acres; Alternative 5 with 474,000 acres; and the Selected Alternative 8 with 486,000 acres.

Trail construction and road reconstruction activities would create noticeable human-induced changes. The least activity was scheduled in Alternative 7 with 721 miles per decade; Alternative 6 with 834 miles per decade; and Alternative 2 with 835 miles per decade. These were all smaller than a number of alternatives including Alternative 8 with 1,276 miles per decade.

Herbicide use for vegetation management was prohibited in Alternative 6, while other alternatives allowed some use for management. Fire also was least impacting in Alternative 6 with less than 11,000 acres prescribed annually. This was followed by Alternative 1 with 35,000 acres burned per year. Alternative 8 and most other alternatives had considerably more at almost 100,000 acres of burning prescribed annually to enhance habitat for RCW and other species.

Although Alternative 8 has a greater effect on the environment than other alternatives, I selected it as the Revised Plan because it generates more net public benefits. Some of these benefits include timber harvest and associated community stability, enhancement of threatened and endangered (T&E) species habitat, and improved multiple recreation opportunities.

Section V - Implementation

Implementation Schedules

The Revised Plan will be implemented through identification, selection, and scheduling projects to meet management goals and objectives. Proposed projects are listed in the Revised Plan, Appendices C and E.

Schedules of proposed projects, published quarterly and mailed to interested and affected persons, will be available for review at Ranger District Offices and the Forest Supervisor's Office. Schedules of projects will routinely change as projects are implemented or removed from the lists for other reasons, and as new projects take their place. Adjustments to schedules may occur based on results of monitoring, budgets, and unforeseen events.

The Revised Plan provides direction with desired future condition statements, goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, monitoring requirements, and probable schedules of management practices. It does not cover projects on specific sites except in a broad manner. Management activity schedules displayed in Appendices C and E of the Revised Plan are not decisions for

with NEPA prior to a decision to complete the project.

The Revised Plan's implementation schedule is translated into multi-year program budget proposals. The proposals are used for requesting and allocating funds needed to achieve planned management direction.

The Forest Supervisor has authority to change the implementation schedule to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and actual appropriated funds. As a result, outputs and activities in individual years may differ from those projected in the Revised Plan. Significant deviations that alter the long-term relationships between goods and services projected in the Revised Plan may result in an amendment or revision.

All new projects, including timber sales, will be in compliance with direction contained in the Revised Plan after it goes into effect. In addition, all new permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy of National Forest system land and resource uses must also be in conformance with the Revised Plan. Permits, contracts, and other instruments which were in existence prior to Revised Plan implementation will be revised (if needed) subject to valid existing rights.

In implementing the Revised Plan project activities, the Forest Supervisor will comply with the Record of Decision issued for these documents. The Revised Plan will be effective 30 days after the Notice of Availability of this Revised Plan, the FEIS, and Record of Decision appears in the Federal Register.

Implementation & Budgets

Decisions to proceed with projects are made at the implementation phase of forest management. Project development and scheduling will be achieved through an integrated resource management approach, assuring interdisciplinary teamwork, and public involvement throughout the process. Site-specific analyses for projects will be conducted in environmental assessments, environmental impact statements, or categorical exclusions in accordance with NEPA, NFMA, and other environmental laws. NEPA analyses for projects will be tiered to the FEIS for this Revised Plan pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.

Although outputs projected in the Revised Plan appear to be achievable from a physical, biological, and legal perspective, the Revised Plan does not guarantee that specific output levels will be met. For example, the ASQ is the maximum chargeable volume of timber that may be sold over the 10-year period, not necessarily the amount of timber that will be sold. Factors such as the demand for timber products, annual Forest Service budgets, and environmental considerations will influence the actual volume offered for sale.

Management activities scheduled in the Revised Plan will be used to plan multi-year program budget proposals. These proposals will be used to request and allocate funds. Outputs and activities in individual years may be significantly different than the averages shown in Chapter IV of the FEIS, depending on available funds.

Monitoring and Evaluation

will provide information on the progress and results of implementation. This information will be evaluated and used as feedback to the planning process for possible future change.

Chapter V of the Revised Plan outlines the specific process that will be used for monitoring. The overall objective of monitoring is to ensure that standards and guidelines and management area direction are being correctly applied and producing the desired conditions. The information gathered during monitoring will also be used to update inventories, to improve mitigation measures, and to assess the need for amending or revising the Plan.

The results and trends of monitoring and evaluation will be described in a periodic monitoring report. This report of monitoring activities and results will be available for public review.

As part of the monitoring and evaluation plan, I am directing the Forest Supervisor to continue involving citizens to help ensure the Revised Plan is implemented as directed in this decision.

Management is not static, and public involvement will be used to foster communication throughout the implementation of individual projects and activities scheduled in this Revised Plan.

Mitigation

Mitigation measures are an integral part of the standards and guidelines and management area direction. The management standards, developed through an ID Team effort, contain measures to mitigate or eliminate any long-term adverse environmental effects. These mitigation measures which include "Best Management Practices," as described by the State of Texas, are incorporated by reference under the requirements of Section 319 of the Clean Water Act. Additional mitigation measures may be developed and implemented at the project level consistent with the measures identified in Chapter IV and Appendix E of the Revised Plan.

Endangered Species Act Section 7 Consultation

This decision is made with the benefit of the March 25, 1996, non-jeopardy opinion from the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) on the Biological Assessment for the Revised Plan and FEIS (FEIS Appendix I).

The Biological Opinion (BO) Appendix provides direction for conducting consultations pursuant to Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act for projects consistent with this Revised Plan. All project level activities will undergo separate NEPA review when proposed, as well as a review under Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act. NFGT biological evaluations with determinations of effect on the RCW or any other federally listed species of "**not likely to adversely affect"** will continue to require USFWS review and concurrence.

All projects impacting RCW must be in compliance with the Regional RCW Strategy and its Record of Decision and the BO. All projects proposed within the RCW HMA's evaluate impacts to T&E species, and include management requirements to avoid impacts to habitat where possible, minimize unavoidable impacts to the extent possible, and mitigate unavoidable impacts with actions to facilitate recovery of the T&E.

March 25, 1996 USFWS BO will be in effect until management area land allocations or standards and guidelines, or other actions directly affecting RCW and other T&E species are proposed during

consultation is required where discretionary federal agency involvement or control over the action has been retained (or is authorized by law) and if: (1) the amount or extent of incidental take is exceeded; (2) new information reveals effects of the agency action may affect listed species or critical habitat in any manner or to an extent not considered in the opinion; (3) the agency action is subsequently modified in a manner that causes an effect to the listed species or critical habitat not considered in the opinion; or (4) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated may be affected by the action.

Five ongoing or prepared timber sale projects have been reviewed for compliance with the Endangered Species Act, the Regional RCW Strategy, and for direction given in their project decision. A listing of these sales is given in the February 1, 1996, Biological Assessment (FEIS, Appendix I). The USFWS has considered these projects during the consultation on the Revised Plan, and based on their opinion that these sales will not jeopardize endangered species, I have decided to allow these sales to continue.

The USFWS BO is conditional upon specific reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions being implemented, as part of Selected Alternative 8 (Revised Plan). The reasonable and prudent measures and terms and conditions deal with RCW management, RCW monitoring actions, and reporting (FEIS Appendix I) will be implemented.

Amendment and Revision Process

The Revised Plan may be changed either by an amendment or a revision. An amendment or revision may become necessary as a result of situations such as (36 CFR 219.10(f)):

Recommendations based on the review of monitoring reports;

Determination that an existing or proposed permit, contract, cooperative agreement, or other instrument authorizing occupancy and use is not consistent with the Plan, but should be approved, based on project level analysis;

Adjustment of management area boundaries or descriptions;

Changes necessitated by resolution of administrative appeals, litigation, or legislation;

Changes needed to improve monitoring plans or information and assumptions used in the Forest Plan; and

Changes made necessary by altered physical, biological, social, or economic conditions.

Based on an analysis of the objectives, standards and guidelines, and other aspects of the Plan, the Forest Supervisor shall determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change to the Plan. If the change is determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor shall follow the same procedure as that required for development and approval of the Plan. If the change is not determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment after appropriate public notice and compliance with NEPA. The procedure is described by 36 CFR 219.10(e) and (f), 36 CFR 219.12(k), FSM 1922.51-52 and FSH 1909.12, section 5.32.

nonsignificant amendments.

NFMA requires revision of the Plan at least every 15 years. However, it may be revised sooner if physical conditions or demands on the land and resources have changed sufficiently to affect overall goals or uses for the entire forest. If a revision becomes necessary, procedures described in 36 CFR 219.12 will be followed.

Section VI - Appeal Rights and Approval

Appeal Rights

This decision may be appealed in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 217 by filing a written notice of appeal in duplicate within 90 days of the date of publication of the legal notice. The appeal must be filed with the Reviewing Officer:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: NFS Appeals Staff/3NW
P.O. Box 96090
201 14th Street SW
Washington, DC 20090-6090

The Notice of Appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9).

The schedule of proposed and probable projects for the first decade is included in the appendices to the Revised Plan. Decisions on these proposed and probable projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation is completed in compliance with NEPA. Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in this document.

If you would like more information about the Revised Plan or FEIS, or would like to review planning records, please contact:

William S. Bartush, Planning Team Leader
National Forests and Grasslands in Texas
701 North First Street
Lufkin, TX 75901
(409) 639-8501

/s/Robert C. Joslin
Regional Forester
Southern Region
USDA Forest Service

March 28, 1996

Where to View Complete Documents

The Final Environmental Impact Statement, Plan, Map Package and Record of Decision can be reviewed at the following locations:

Angelina National ForestDavy Crockett National Forest
1907 Atkinson Drive1240 East Loop 304
Lufkin, Texas 75901Crockett, Texas 75835

Sabine National ForestSam Houston National Forest
201 South PalmWest of I-45, on FM 1375
Hemphill, Texas 75948New Waverly, Texas 77358

Caddo/LBJ National GrasslandsNational Forests & Grasslands
1400 North US 81/287in Texas, Supervisors Office
Decatur, Texas 76234701 North First Street
Lufkin, Texas 75901

.....and Local Libraries as follows:

AlvordAlvord Public Library
AustinNational Archives/Records Administration, Lyndon B. Johnson, Library & Museum, Texas Legislative Reference Library, University of Texas Libraries
BeaumontLamar University, Mary & Jon Gray Library
BonhamBonham Public Library
CarthagePanola Junior College, M.P. Barker Library
ClevelandAustin Memorial Library
College StationTexas A&M University, Sterling C. Evans Library, Texas Forest Service Library, Texas A&M University,
ConroeMontgomery County Library
CrockettCrockett Public Library
DallasDallas Public Library, Southern Methodist University, Central University Libraries
DecaturDecatur Public Library
DentonDenton Public Library
DibollT.L.L. Temple Memorial Library
HemphillJ.R. Huffman Public Library
Honey GroveHoney Grove Public Library
HoustonHouston Public Library, Rice University, Fondren Library, University of Houston, M.D. Anderson Memorial Library
HuntsvilleSam Houston State University, Newton Gresham Library, Huntsville Public Library
JasperJasper Public Library
LufkinAngelina College Library, Kurth Memorial Library
MontgomeryWest Branch Library
NacogdochesNacogdoches Public Library, Stephen F. Austin State University Library
PinelandArthur Temple Sr. Memorial Library
Prairie ViewPrairie View A&M University, W.R. Banks Library
WillisWillis Public Library
WoodlandsSouth Regional Library