

**The Evolution of National Forest System Land Management  
Planning and  
Results of the Review of  
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan  
Environmental Impact Statements**

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## *Executive Summary*

### **Overview**

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the Forest Service to develop, amend, and revise land and resource management plans for National Forest System units. In accordance with NFMA and planning rules promulgated in 1979 and 1982 the Forest Service has been preparing land and resource management plans for over 25 years. As the Forest Service gained experience with planning, their understanding of planning and its relationship to the National Environmental Policy Act evolved. The Forest Service applied their experience with the 1982 rule to develop the 2005 National Forest Management Act land management planning rule (2005 rule).

The 2005 rule provides that development, amendment, and revision of Forest Service land management plan components, or portions thereof, are actions that may be categorically excluded from National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation.<sup>1</sup> The Forest Service has proposed a corresponding change to its NEPA procedures. Specifically, the Forest Service has proposed adding a category to its NEPA procedures to categorically exclude from NEPA documentation an action approving a new plan, or revising or amending an existing plan, except in extraordinary circumstances.<sup>2</sup>

A common public comment on this proposed categorical exclusion is an assertion that plans have significant effects that should be analyzed and documented in an environmental impact statement (EIS). In response to these public comments, the Forest Service conducted a review of final environmental impact statements (FEISs) associated with land management plan revisions prepared under the 1982 rule.<sup>3</sup> The agency selected a random sample of 20 contemporary revised plans and their associated FEISs and records of decisions (RODs). A number of experienced Forest Service personnel participated in the review.<sup>4</sup> This review determined what effects and features of plans were analyzed in the FEISs and why they were evaluated. This report documents the results of the review and supplements the agency's administrative record for the proposed categorical exclusion.<sup>5</sup>

### **Results in Brief**

The results of this FEIS review confirm the agency's conclusion, based on over 25 years of Forest Service experience with NFMA land management planning, that absent extraordinary circumstances, the actions approving plans and amending and revising plans under the 2005 rule will not have significant environmental effects. Plan components will be applied if and when projects and activities implementing the plan are approved. Plans typically will not include prohibitions on activities and uses in certain areas and typically will not result in authorization of a future action. Thus, absent extraordinary circumstances, no effects will occur from an action approving a new plan, or amending or

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<sup>1</sup> 36 CFR 219.4(b)

<sup>2</sup> 70 FR 1062

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to the "Results of the Review of Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statements" report (Report).

<sup>4</sup> A list of the reviewers, and their credentials, is located at the end of the Report.

<sup>5</sup> Please refer to the Report

revising an existing plan. As there will be no effects from such actions, there likewise, will be no significant effects requiring the preparation of an EIS.

The FEIS review confirms this conclusion because none of the sampled FEISs prepared under the 1982 rule analyzed any effects related to the action of adopting plan goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines except when standards prohibited activities in certain areas. The sampled FEISs only analyzed the effects of: (1) alternative plans whose implementation was characterized by hypothetical projects and activities that may occur in the plan area<sup>6</sup>; (2) projects and activities specifically authorized in conjunction with a plan revision<sup>7</sup>; or (3) specific prohibitions in management areas, and generally as these applied to the hypothetical projects and activities<sup>8</sup>. The effects that were analyzed are explained below.

First, the 1982 rule required a comparison of alternative plans to identify the alternative that comes closest to maximizing net public benefits.<sup>9</sup> The alternative plans were compared in the FEISs accompanying a plan amendment or revision. The alternative plans were compared based on analyses of the environmental effects associated with implementing each alternative. Each alternative's implementation was estimated through hypothetical projects and activities that possibly could occur under each of the alternatives. For the analysis of these hypothetical projects and activities, management direction from the alternatives was applied to those projects and activities to further estimate the alternatives' implementation. Since the projects were hypothetical, the analysis during the plan revision process was likewise, and thus was not an accurate projection of plan implementation. Unlike the 1982 rule, the 2005 rule does not require development and comparison of plan alternatives.

Second, the reviewed RODs generally stated that plans do not compel, direct, dictate, mandate, or make a commitment to any specific project. However, in limited instances, specific projects or activities were approved in conjunction with a plan revision using the 1982 rule. In those instances, the applicable FEIS contained site-specific analysis of the environmental effects for the specific project or activity. Under the 2005 rule, project and activity authorization typically will not occur in conjunction with plan development, amendment, and revision. If projects or activities are authorized at the time a plan is approved, their authorization will be accompanied by the appropriate NEPA documentation.

Finally, some of the sampled plans designated specific management areas. The specific management areas had prescriptions that sometimes included prohibitions on activities and uses. The effects of the prohibitions were analyzed and documented in the FEISs as part of the analysis of alternatives (see discussion above). The FEISs generally analyzed the application of these prohibitions to hypothetical projects and activities to demonstrate their effectiveness in mitigating environmental impacts. Plans completed under the 2005 rule

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<sup>6</sup> Refer to "Effects Analysis Based on Projected Projects and Activities" section in the Report

<sup>7</sup> Refer to "Specific Decisions Included in some Reviewed RODs" section in the Report

<sup>8</sup> Refer to "Management Direction Applied to Projects or Activities" section in the Report

<sup>9</sup> 36 CFR 219.12(f), September 30, 1982, as amended

may designate areas as special areas because of the unique or special characteristics of the area. These designations will not include prohibitions on uses and activities in the area. If an administrative designation is made that includes prohibitions on activities and uses in the designated area, the designation will be made through a separate administrative process that includes appropriate NEPA analysis and documentation. Plans under the 2005 rule also will identify any special areas already designated by statute, including any statutory prohibitions and restrictions applicable to the special area.

### ***Conclusion***

The FEIS review confirmed that plans revised under the 1982 rule were programmatic documents, providing a broad and general management strategy to guide future site-specific decisions. That management strategy was used to design projects and activities that implemented the plans.

The reviewed plan FEISs analyzed effects of hypothetical projects and activities that might occur under each of the alternatives. The agency analyzed these effects to estimate the implementation of alternatives rather than analyzing the management direction content in the alternatives. Most reviewed RODs stated that no commitment to any project or activity was being made at the time of plan approval. In limited instances, specific projects and activities were authorized in conjunction with the plan approval. In those instances, the FEIS accompanying the plan revision included an analysis of the environmental effects for those specific projects or activities. Some plan revisions provided for management areas and sometimes included standards that prohibited activities and uses in those areas. Generally, the effects of applying those standards to hypothetical projects or activities were analyzed as part of the alternatives' effects analysis in the FEISs. None of the reviewed FEISs analyzed the effects of the action to approve plan goals, objectives, and standards and guidelines unless the standards included prohibitions, as discussed above.

Plans under the 2005 rule will describe desired conditions, and objectives for the plan area, and provide guidance for future project decisions. Plans under the 2005 rule typically will not authorize projects or activities.<sup>10</sup> If plans do authorize projects or activities, the appropriate analysis and documentation will be completed for those projects or activities in accordance with NEPA. The planning process under the 2005 rule does not require development of plan alternatives, so there will be no need to analyze implementation of the plan through hypothetical projects or activities over the life of a plan as a basis for comparing alternatives. Finally, plans under the 2005 rule generally will not include standards or prohibitions, so there is no need to analyze the effects of those. If prohibitions are included, the portion of the plan component that contains the prohibitions will be analyzed as appropriate, under NEPA.

### ***Epilogue (Cimarron-Comanche National Grasslands plan)***

In addition to its FEIS review, the Forest Service prepared an environmental assessment (EA) for a plan revision under the 2005 rule for the Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands portion of the Pike and San Isabel National Forest. This EA resulted in a

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<sup>10</sup> 36 CFR 219.3(b)

Finding of No significant Impact (FONSI) for the Grasslands plan.<sup>11</sup> The EA/FONSI confirmed that the components of the Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands Land Management Plan could not be linked in a cause-effect relationship over time and within the geographic area to effects on air quality; threatened and endangered species; significant scientific, cultural, and historic resources; water quality; or other resources. Such relationships cannot exist without specific proposals and without such relationships environmental impacts cannot occur. The plan does not authorize or compel future projects or activities implementing the plan so there are no specific proposals associated with the plan. Therefore, the plan itself has no significant impacts on the quality of the environment. The finding of no significant impact further supports and reinforces the conclusions in the FEIS report. The Cimarron-Comanche National Grasslands plan will be approved later in calendar year 2006.

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<sup>11</sup> December 2005, [http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/projects/forest\\_revision/draft\\_gr\\_ea.pdf](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/psicc/projects/forest_revision/draft_gr_ea.pdf).

## The Evolution of National Forest System Land Management Planning

### *Background*

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires the Forest Service to develop, amend, and revise land and resource management plans for National Forest System units. The Forest Service has prepared FEISs for plan revisions more than 150 times between 1979 (the date of the first plan developed under NFMA) and 2005 (the date of the current planning rule). The Forest Service also has amended most of its 125 plans many times during the last 25 years with significant amendments being analyzed and disclosed in an EIS.

### *Why the Forest Service Prepared EISs under the 1982 rule*

The NFMA grants the Secretary of Agriculture the authority to decide “when and for what plans” an EIS is required (16 U.S.C. 1604 (g) (1)). The 1979 and the 1982 planning rules required EISs for approval of plans, significant amendments, and revisions. The EIS process was expected to facilitate greater public involvement and coordination of various statutory requirements in a single document.

As a means to achieve Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act and NFMA objectives, the 1982 rule also included a requirement for development of various alternatives to identify “the alternative that comes nearest to maximizing net public benefits....”<sup>12</sup> The Forest Service took this approach even though nothing in the NFMA (or any other substantive statute directing management of the National Forest System) demands that land management plans develop or consider alternative management regimes or alternative programs. The NFMA alternatives were to include a range of resource outputs, projects and activities, and expenditure levels. The 1982 rule also established requirements for an “analysis of the management situation” and “benchmark analyses.” These planning requirements were used to define a range of resource production possibilities for various alternatives. The formulation of alternatives was intended to help the decision-maker maximize the use of various resources, consistent with the protection of other resources and objectives. The Forest Service believed at that time that plans were a collection of 15 years worth of projects.

Both the 1979 and 1982 rules required that alternatives be compared using the range of hypothetical resource outputs that could occur under each alternative. Each alternative contained standards and guidelines that would apply to implemented activities. Interdisciplinary teams developing plans comparatively analyzed the effects of plan

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<sup>12</sup> 36 CFR 219.12(f), September 30, 1982, as amended

alternatives based on forecasts and broad predictions of future conditions and budgets. These teams completed this analysis despite there being no assurance that potential output levels would be realized when plans were actually implemented. The Forest Service essentially speculated about hypothetical projects and activities over a 15 year period. With the 1982 rule, Forest Service believed the most efficient planning approach was to integrate the rule's regulatory requirement to formulate alternatives to maximize net public benefit with the NEPA alternative requirement (i.e., 40 CFR 1502.14). Given the massive resources devoted to approving, revising, and amending plans, the agency believed that if EISs were prepared at the point of developing plans, plan revisions, and plan amendments those EISs would generally be sufficient for implementing subsequent projects and activities. If this was not possible, the Agency believed that any additional NEPA analysis and disclosure needed for projects and activities could simply tier to or supplement the analysis in the plan FEIS.

### ***Forest Service Experience with Plan-Level NEPA under the 1982 rule***

As the Forest Service gained experience with land management planning, it became clear that the agency was incorrect in its view that plans were essentially a collection of 15 years' worth of projects and decisions. Many of the hypothetical projects and activities never occurred because of unforeseen circumstances, such as budgets and changed land conditions, among other reasons. The agency also learned that this view was not compatible with adaptive management principles (e.g., monitoring, plan amendments, or plan revisions). Throughout the years of implementing plans, the agency learned that plan FEISs were not nearly as useful at the project level as the agency had expected.

The effects analysis in Plan FEISs was far too general to meet analytical needs for projects and became quickly out of date. In addition, as the result of litigation, the Forest Service found that analysis and documentation in EAs and EISs was still necessary for projects and activities. The Forest Service found itself preparing much more site-specific NEPA documentation for projects than it had anticipated when it adopted the 1979 and 1982 rules. The plan analysis largely had to be re-done when implementing projects were approved. Meaningful analysis of a project's effects could not be done until the project design, the project location's environmental conditions, and what management directions would apply to the project based on the project design were known. Many of the sampled FEISs and RODs specifically state that meaningful environmental effects for individual, site-specific projects are not described in the plan-level NEPA documents for the reasons stated above.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, the 1982 rule required that multiple-use prescriptions be provided for management areas. Management areas were used to prescribe management direction for specific areas, including special areas (e.g., wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, national recreation areas). Some management area standards prohibited certain management actions or uses in the management area. The plan FEISs generally analyzed the application of these standards to the hypothetical projects and activities to demonstrate the effectiveness of the standards in

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<sup>13</sup> See "Management Direction Applied to Project or Activities" section in the Report

mitigating possible environmental impacts from implementing activities.

In 1988, the Chief of the Forest Service confirmed in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests appeal decision<sup>14</sup> that plans do not irretrievably commit roadless areas to development, nor disclose the site-specific environmental effects of subsequent individual projects in roadless areas. The Chief also established that these subsequent projects will be subject to further NEPA analysis and documentation. Later that year, the Chief of the Forest Service established in the Flathead National Forest appeal decision<sup>15</sup> that land management planning for National Forest System units involves two levels of decisions: land management plan approval, followed by project or activity decisions. Based on these appeal decisions, the Forest Service began describing these two levels of decision-making when revising plans. Several of the sampled RODs specifically described the distinction between plan and project decisions.<sup>16</sup>

Ten years after the Forest Service made the distinction between plan and project decisions, a Supreme Court decision reinforced the distinction. The U.S. Supreme Court described the nature of Forest Service land management plans in *Ohio Forestry Ass'n v. Sierra Club*, (523 U.S. 726, 737 (1998)) explaining that plans are “tools for agency planning and management.” The Court recognized that the provisions of such plans “do not command anyone to do anything or to refrain from doing anything; they do not grant, withhold, or modify any formal legal license, power, or authority; they do not subject anyone to any civil or criminal liability; they create no legal rights or obligations” (523 U.S. 733 (1998)). The Court found that before the Forest Service can permit logging, it must:

- (a) Propose a specific area where logging will take place and the harvesting methods to be used;
- (b) Ensure that the project is consistent with the Plan;
- (c) Provide those affected by proposed logging notice and an opportunity to be heard;
- (d) Conduct an environmental analysis pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, to evaluate the effects of the specific project and to contemplate alternatives; and
- (e) Subsequently make a final decision to permit logging, which affected persons may challenge in an administrative appeals process and in court.

Through its planning experience, and the Supreme Court’s reinforcement of this experience, the agency came to understand what in the planning process was useful to agency personnel and to the public. Plans were most useful when they described goals and objectives for the land. They also were useful in establishing guidance for projects. The guidance provided useful starting points for project design, even though it typically needed to be verified or modified in the field on a site-specific basis before being applied. What were not useful were detailed descriptions of hypothetical projects and activities – these projects and activities, in estimating the implementation of alternatives, were obsolete

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<sup>14</sup> August 15, 1988

<sup>15</sup> August 30, 1988

<sup>16</sup> See Table 2 in the Report, specifically the RODs associated with the Francis-Marion, Arapaho-Roosevelt, and Routt National Forests

nearly as soon as they were written.

The agency also found tension between the formulation of alternatives and effective public involvement. Alternative development under the previous planning rules encouraged interest groups to cling to the alternative they favored. This tended to limit the agency's ability to build consensus around the integration of multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services with the public's needs, concerns, and values for National Forest System lands.

### ***Applying Agency Experience with the 1982 rule to the 2005 rule***

To more clearly focus the planning process on what is useful to the agency and the public, the 2005 rule eliminates the requirement for development and consideration of a range of plan alternatives. Instead, the rule requires consideration of a single plan option, which is iteratively developed and modified by collaboratively working with the interested and affected public. The agency discovered that collaboration and public participation is more effective when it focuses on building broad-based support around a single, compromise option.

The Forest Service also eliminated the detailed descriptions and analysis of hypothetical projects and activities, thereby eliminating any expectation that the plan made or had the effect of making final decisions with respect to those projects and activities. However, as with the 1982 rule, in the rare instance when a specific project or activity is authorized through a plan action the effects associated with that specific project or activity will be analyzed separately in accordance with NEPA.

In the 2005 rule, the agency emphasized developing plan components that establish desired conditions and objectives for the future condition of the land and plan components that provide guidance to inform the design of future projects and activities. Such an approach is consistent with the nature of Forest Service land management plans as "tools for agency planning and management", as acknowledged in *Ohio Forestry Ass'n v. Sierra Club*, 523 U.S. 726 (1998).

The 2005 rule also provides that special areas may be identified or designated during plan development, amendment, or revision. Special areas can also be designated through a separate administrative process. Special area designations may or may not include specific prohibitions or prescriptions. If an administratively designated special area includes prohibitions on uses and activities in the area, that area's designation will be accomplished through a separate planning process, and be supported by an appropriate NEPA document, before it is identified in the plan.

Special areas that are statutorily designated will be also identified in the plan, along with any applicable prohibitions or restrictions on uses in the designated area. The agency directives for the 2005 rule require that, for a special area recommendation such as a wilderness or wild and scenic rivers recommendation:

1. The plan would document that it is a preliminary recommendation,
2. The plan set of documents would identify the information used to support the recommendation, and
3. If the Chief decides to forward such a preliminary recommendation to the Secretary, an applicable NEPA document will be completed and accompany the recommendation.

With these changes in the nature of plans, the Forest Service concluded that it was appropriate to categorically exclude plan approval, plan amendment, and plan revisions from analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS except in extraordinary circumstances.

### ***A Comparison of Plan Features under the 1982 rule and Plan Components under the 2005 rule***

Table 1 compares plan features under the 1982 rule to plan components under the 2005 rule. The table is divided into two parts:

- Plan features/components that have no effects at the time of approval of a plan, plan amendment, or plan revision. These features/components are used to design implementing projects and activities.
- Plan features that have actual or projected effects, which are analyzed at the time of approval of a plan, plan amendment, or plan revision.

Table 1. Comparison of plan features/components under the 1982 and 2005 rules

Plan feature	1982 planning rule	2005 planning rule
<b>1. Plan features / components with no effect at the time of approval of a plan, plan amendment, or plan revision.</b>	Goals	Desired conditions
	Objectives	Objectives
	Standards and guidelines that did not contain prohibitions on uses or activities	Guidelines
	Lands suitable for resource management	Area suitability identification
	Management areas with no prohibitions on uses or activities, such as, wilderness recommendations	Special areas with no prohibitions on uses or activities
	Monitoring and evaluation requirements	Monitoring Program requirements
<b>2. Plan features that have actual or projected effects, which are analyzed at the time of approval of a plan, plan amendment, or plan revision</b>	Approval of specific projects or activities as part of plan approval	Projects and Activities typically will not be approved in conjunction with plan development, amendment, and revision. If so, approval for those projects and activities will be accompanied by an appropriate NEPA document
	Alternative plans to maximize net public benefit	Alternative plans will not be included
	Hypothetical projects and activities to estimate effects of alternatives	Hypothetical projects and activities will not be included
	Management area prescriptions (including special area prescriptions) that included specific prohibitions in the form of standards	Any special area designations with prescriptions will be analyzed in an appropriate NEPA document

The review of plan FEISs prepared under the 1982 rule revealed that the analyses in the FEISs addressed things that are no longer included or routinely expected to be found in plans under the 2005 rule, specifically:

1. Approval of specific projects or activities at the time of plan approval,
2. Alternatives to maximize net public benefit,
3. Projected projects and activities to estimate effects of alternatives, and
4. Management area prescriptions that included specific prohibitions in the form of standards.

None of the reviewed FEISs disclosed any significant environmental effects associated with the plan features/components identified in Part 1 of Table 1 that are common to both the 1982 rule and the 2005 rule.

While a limited number of the reviewed plan FEISs addressed approval of specific projects or activities (item 1 above), the majority of the FEIS content described the hypothetical effects of assumptions about the future program levels that would occur under the alternatives, even though the plan itself contained no decisions or commitments for those program levels. Forest Service planners made these assumptions because the 1982 rule required a broad range of alternatives, which included a range of resource outputs and expenditure levels to be analyzed. The 2005 rule no longer requires such alternatives.

### ***Application of NEPA under the 2005 rule***

The FEIS review further reinforces the Forest Service's judgment from its experience with land management planning under the 1982 rule that plans under the 2005 rule may appropriately be categorically excluded from analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS except in extraordinary circumstances.

The Forest Service believes that NEPA analysis through the preparation of an EA or EIS is most appropriate at the project and activity level, when final and site-specific decisions with effects are being made and when up-to-date and site-specific information pertinent to the decision is available. The consideration of site-specific information, coupled with the finality of the specific proposed action and decision, will make the appropriate NEPA analysis relevant and meaningful.

## **Results of the Review of Revised Land and Resource Management Plan Environmental Impact Statements**

### **Scope of Plan FEIS Review**

The Forest Service focused on the following questions in reviewing the sampled plan FEISs. Appendix B further details the methodology used for the plan FEIS review.

- How are effects analyses described in the plan FEISs?
- Did the plan FEISs compare effects of the plans' management direction or the

effects from other features of the plans or the planning process?

## Plan FEIS Selection

For its sample pool, the Forest Service selected 42 Forest Service units that had revised their plans. These 42 Forest Service units approved revised plans, along with the associated FEISs and Records of Decision (RODs), between 1993 and 2005. Seven of the nine Forest Service regions revised plans during this time. The agency used a simple random sample of 20 plan RODs and FEISs for an unbiased, representative review of the 42 plan FEISs (see Appendix A). This sample allowed the agency to review at least one plan ROD and FEIS from each of the seven eligible regions. Following is the list of Forest Service units whose plan RODs and FEISs were reviewed.

**Table 2. Forest Service units reviewed**

Region	Planning unit	Year Plan Was Revised
8	Francis-Marion National Forest	1996
2	Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest	1998
2	Routt National Forest	1998
8	Kisatchie National Forest	1999
8	National Forests in Florida	1999
1	Dakota Prairie Grasslands	2002
2	Nebraska National Forest	2002
2	White River National Forest	2002
10	Chugach National Forest	2002
4	Boise National Forest	2003
4	Payette National Forest	2003
4	Uinta National Forest	2003
2	Medicine Bow National Forest	2004
8	Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest	2004
8	Daniel Boone National Forest	2004
8	Jefferson National Forest	2004
8	Sumter National Forest	2004
5	Cleveland National Forest	2005
9	Mark Twain National Forest	2005
9	White Mountain National Forest	2005

## Data Analysis

The agency completed a review of the 20 plan RODs and FEISs in the sample. For each reviewed plan ROD and FEIS (and associated appendices), representative excerpts were identified to answer the review questions listed in the “Scope of the Plan FEIS Review” section. These excerpts illustrate the plan features and types of effects that were analyzed in the reviewed FEISs. Appendix C records the plan FEIS representative excerpts. Data was entered into Microsoft Word document tables and stored at the agency’s headquarters in Washington, D.C.

The Forest Service's Washington Office Ecosystem Management Coordination staff conducted the plan FEIS review to ensure and maximize the quality, objectivity, and integrity of the review.<sup>17</sup> The reviewers all have the knowledge and experience necessary to evaluate plan FEISs and how those FEISs described and evaluated environmental effects.

### ***Results of the Plan FEIS Review***

There are four sections summarizing the results of this review:

1. Nature of Land Management Planning and Need for Site Specific Planning
2. Specific Decisions Included in Some Reviewed FEISs
3. Effects Analysis Based on Hypothetical Projects and Activities
4. Management Direction Applied to Projects or Activities

Each section topic starts with a conclusion for that section, followed by a summary of the plan FEIS review for that particular topic, and finally, a display of representative plan FEIS and/or ROD excerpts identified in the review that support the conclusion.

#### **Nature of Land Management Planning and Need for Site-Specific Planning**

***Conclusion:*** *The review confirmed that plans prepared under the 1982 planning rule establish a strategic framework for project decision-making.*

Every reviewed FEIS confirmed that plans are programmatic documents, providing a broad and general management strategy for implementing projects and activities. This management strategy is primarily comprised of six programmatic decisions (hereafter termed "management direction"). These six decisions which were described in each of the twenty reviewed FEISs.

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<sup>17</sup> A list of the reviewers, and their credentials, is located at the end of this report.

The six decisions are:

1. Multiple-use goals and objectives<sup>18</sup>
2. Standards and guidelines<sup>19</sup>
3. Management area prescriptions<sup>20</sup>
4. Identification of the suitability of lands for resource management, including identification of lands not suited for timber production<sup>21</sup>
5. Recommendation of roadless areas as potential wilderness areas<sup>22</sup>
6. Monitoring and evaluation requirements<sup>23</sup>

The reviewed FEISs clearly distinguished between the six strategic plan decisions and project and activity decisions. Each reviewed FEIS confirmed that the plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific projects and activities, and acknowledges that site-specific project or activity effects will be analyzed and documented in compliance with NEPA when those projects or activities are proposed. Most of the FEISs state that plans do not compel, direct, dictate, mandate, nor make a commitment to any specific project. However, in some cases, a specific project or activity was authorized in conjunction with a plan revision. The “Specific Projects or Activities Decisions” section below describes instances where final decisions for projects or activities were analyzed and approved in conjunction with a plan revision.

Following are representative excerpts from the plan FEISs and/or RODs that supported this conclusion:

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<sup>18</sup> 36 CFR 219.11(b) (September 30, 1982, as amended)

<sup>19</sup> 36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27 (September 30, 1982, as amended)

<sup>20</sup> 36 CFR 219.11(c) (September 30, 1982, as amended)

<sup>21</sup> 36 CFRE 219.14 (September 30, 1982, as amended)

<sup>22</sup> 36 CFR 219.17 (September 30, 1982, as amended)

<sup>23</sup> 36 CFR 219.11(d) (September 30, 1982, as amended)

**Table 3. Reviewed ROD/FEIS excerpts on nature of land management planning and site-specific analysis**

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Francis-Marion NF (1996)	<p>The Forest Plan is carried out at the project level through implementing specific projects at specific locations such as building a trail, developing a campground or thinning a timber stand.</p> <p>The Forest Plan does not direct specific management activities for specific locations, nor does it dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations</p> <p>The Forest Plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site specific environmental analysis and public involvement.</p> <p>The Forest Plan does not contain a commitment to the selection of any specific project nor does it make decisions for any specific projects.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 5</p> <p>ROD, p. 5</p> <p>ROD, p. 31</p> <p>ROD, p. 31</p>
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF (1998)	<p>As a management strategy, the Revised Plan (and FEIS) is programmatic. . . . The Plan provides direction and guidance for future site-specific project decisions. To implement the Revised Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor, District Rangers, and the Regional Forester will issue separate project decisions.</p> <p>Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p> <p>Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in the Revised Forest Plan. Final decisions on proposed projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with NEPA and are subject to appeal at that time.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 18</p> <p>ROD, p. 56</p> <p>ROD, p. 57</p>
Routt NF (1998)	<p>This Revised Plan and FEIS are programmatic and represent a management strategy for the Routt National Forest. The Revised Plan does not include site-specific decisions. Rather, it provides overall systematic guidance and establishes management direction to govern future actions.</p> <p>The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed above, these activities are site-specific and require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. This ROD does not make any site-specific decisions.</p> <p>Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 1</p> <p>ROD, p. 29</p> <p>ROD, p. 29</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Routt NF (cont.) (1998)	This FEIS is a programmatic document. It discloses the environmental consequences on a large scale, at the planning level. This is in contrast to analyses for site-specific projects. The FEIS presents a programmatic action at a Forest level of analysis but does not predict what will happen each time the standards and guidelines are implemented. Environmental consequences for individual, site-specific projects on the Forest are not described. The environmental effects of individual projects will depend on the implementation of each project, the environmental conditions at each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines in each case.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 2
Kisatchie NF (1999)	A forest plan establishes a framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the Forest. A forest plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, by applying forestwide management direction, the forest plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.  Also, listing here does not constitute final project approval. Site-specific environmental analysis and appropriate NEPA documentation will be required for these projects.	ROD, p. R-3  FEIS, Chapter 4, p. 4-77
National Forests in Florida (1999)	A Forest Plan establishes a framework for future decision making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the desired goals, objectives, and future conditions of the forest. A Forest Plan does not contain a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on the Forest Service's internal operations. However, by applying forestwide management direction, the Forest Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.  To achieve desired conditions of the alternatives, certain probable activities may occur. Location, design, and extent of such activities generally are not known or described in a Forest Plan. That is a site-specific (project-by-project) decision. Before implementing any of these activities, a site-specific environmental analysis will be conducted. The discussion in this chapter refers to the programmatic plan decisions affect on the environment	ROD, p. 2  FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1
Dakota Prairie Grasslands (2002)	The Grasslands Supervisor and District Rangers will consider many new proposed activities during the life of this plan. Site-specific analyses will be done before approving these activities to insure they are compliant with the goals, objectives, and standards and guides of the revised plan.	ROD, p. 40

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Dakota Prairie Grasslands (cont.) (2002)	Forest Plans set out management area prescriptions with standards and guidelines for future decision-making and are adjustable through monitoring and evaluation, amendment and revision. The [Forest Plan] management area prescriptions and forest and grassland wide direction are the “zoning ordinances” under which future decisions are made . . . Project decisions are not authorized, carried out or funded by Forest Plan approval, amendments or revisions except as specifically authorized in the Record of Decision or Decision Notice.	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-9
Nebraska NF (2002)	<p>This Revised Plan and FEIS are programmatic and represent a management strategy for the [Nebraska National Forests]. The Revised Plan does not include site-specific decisions. Rather, it provides overall systematic guidance and establishes management direction to govern future actions.</p> <p>The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed above, these activities are site-specific and require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished.</p> <p>Forest Plans set out management area prescriptions with standards and guidelines for future decision-making and are adjustable through monitoring and evaluation, amendment and revision. The [Forest Plan] management area prescriptions and forest and grassland wide direction are the “zoning ordinances” under which future decisions are made . . . Project decisions are not authorized, carried out or funded by Forest Plan approval, amendments or revisions except as specifically authorized in the Record of Decision or Decision Notice.</p>	<p>ROD, pp. 4-5</p> <p>ROD, p. 42</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 1, p.1-9</p>
White River NF (2002)	This Revised Plan and FEIS are programmatic and represent a broad management strategy for the White River National Forest. The Revised Plan does not include site-specific decisions. Rather it provides overall systematic guidance and establishes management direction to govern future actions.	ROD, p. 1
Chugach NF (2002)	The Revised Forest Plan does not provide final authorization for any site-specific activity. It provides a programmatic framework within which project-level decisions are considered. Projects must undergo appropriate site-specific analysis, and comply with applicable requirements for public participation, environmental analysis and disclosure, and administrative appeal procedures before final authorization and implementation.	ROD, p. 45
Boise NF (2003)	A Forest Plan establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest. A Forest Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations. The Revised Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.	ROD, p. 21

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Boise NF (cont.) (2003)	The Records of Decision will set a course of action for managing the Ecogroup Forests [Boise, Payette and Sawtooth] for the next 10 to 15 years. However, project-level environmental analysis will continue for specific proposals implementing the revised Forest Plans, such as the closure or obliteration of existing roads. For example, Forest Plans contain general direction to close or obliterate roads to help achieve management goals . . . However, a subsequent site-specific NEPA analysis and decision will have to be made before actually implementing a proposal to close or obliterate any specific road	FEIS, Chapter 1, pp. 1-8 to 1-9
Payette NF (2003)	<p>A Forest Plan establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest. A Forest Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations. The Revised Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.</p> <p>The Records of Decision will set a course of action for managing the Ecogroup Forests [Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth] for the next 10 to 15 years. However, project-level environmental analysis will continue for specific proposals implementing the revised Forest Plans, such as the closure or obliteration of existing roads. For example, Forest Plans contain general direction to close or obliterate roads to help achieve management goals . . . However, a subsequent site-specific NEPA analysis and decision will have to be made before actually implementing a proposal to close or obliterate any specific road</p>	<p>ROD, p. 21</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 1, pp. 1-8 to 1-9</p>
Uinta NF (2003)	A Forest Plan establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest. A Forest Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project, nor does it dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations. The Revised Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities.	ROD, p. 13
Medicine Bow NF (2004)	This Revised Forest Plan and FEIS are programmatic and represent a broad management strategy for the Medicine Bow National Forest that provides broad direction for sustaining healthy forest and rangeland conditions . . . Apart from these decisions, the Revised Plan provides overall systematic guidance and establishes management direction to govern future actions.	ROD, p. 1

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
<p>Medicine Bow NF (cont.) (2004)</p>	<p>The Forest Service Planning Handbook (FSH 1909.12) provides for systematic stepping down from the overall direction provided in the Plan when making project level decisions:</p> <p>“Planning for units of the National Forest System involve two levels of decisions. The first is the development of a Forest Plan that provides direction for all resource management programs, practices, uses, and protection measures. The second level of planning involves the analysis and implementation of management practices designed to achieve the goals and objectives of the Forest Plan. This level involves site-specific analysis to meet NEPA requirements for decision-making. FSM 1922, 53 CFR 26807, 26809 (July 15, 1988).”</p> <p>Environmental analysis will need to occur for specific project-level activities that carry out the direction in the Plan.</p> <p>Forest Plans provide broad direction, but do not authorize specific actions. Authorization of specific actions is made as the result of site-specific project analyses. As a result, this FEIS is estimating effects that may or may not occur.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-12</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-5</p>
<p>Chattahoochee – Oconee NF (2004)</p>	<p>The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan . . . Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished.</p> <p>Final decisions on proposed projects will be made on a site-specific basis using appropriate analysis and documentation and in compliance with NEPA. Project decisions may be subject to appeal at that time.</p> <p>Land management activities on national forest lands are conducted only after appropriate site- specific NEPA analysis has been conducted. This provides opportunities to identify and minimize direct, indirect and cumulative environmental effects that cannot be specifically determined or analyzed at the large scale of this FEIS.</p> <p>No decision is being made in the plan that a specific silvicultural system or final harvest method will be used at the individual site level of detail; that is, in a specific vegetation community . . . Choosing the specific harvest method is being left to individual projects during plan implementation, based on Plan objectives being achieved and site-specific factors.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 27</p> <p>ROD, p. 28</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-78</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-545</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Chattahoochee – Oconee NF (cont.) (2004)	The effects analysis at the programmatic Forest Plan level is useful in comparing and evaluating alternatives on a Forestwide basis, but is not intended to provide sufficient detail to be applied to specific locations on the Forest. A Forest-scale roads analysis has also been completed to help inform the decision maker, however, again, it is not intended to provide site-specific analysis. Watershed and project scale analysis will be used to inform site-specific project decisions. It is at these levels of analysis where individual roads in the project area will be identified and effects of implementing a project alternative will be analyzed and disclosed.	FEIS, Appendix G, p. G-108
Daniel Boone NF (2004)	The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Forest Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Forest Plan.  Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished.	ROD, p. 30  ROD, p. 30
Jefferson NF (2004)	The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished.  Forest plans do not compel the agency to undertake any site-specific projects; rather, they establish overall goals and objectives (or desired resource conditions) that the individual national forest will strive to meet. Forest plans also establish limitations on what actions may be authorized, and what conditions must be met, during project decision making.	ROD, p. 38-39  FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-1
Sumter NF (2004)	The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Forest Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed previously, these activities are site-specific and may require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Forest Plan.  Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished.  Land and Resource Management Plans do not compel the agency to undertake any site-specific projects; rather, plans establish overall goals and objectives (or desired resource conditions) that the individual national forest strives to meet. Land and Resource Management Plans also establish limitations on what actions would be authorized, and what conditions would be met, during project level decision.	ROD, p. 23  ROD, p. 23  FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-2

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Sumter NF (cont.) (2004)	The authorization of site-specific activities within a plan area occurs through project decision making, which is the implementation stage of forest planning. Project level decision requires compliance with NEPA procedures and a determination that the project is consistent with the LMP [Land Management Plan].	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-2
Cleveland NF (2005)	<p>The revised forest plan provides the strategic framework within which project-level decisions are designed and implemented . . . The revised forest plan does not provide final authorization for any activity, nor does it compel that any contracts or permits be advertised or awarded.</p> <p>It is important to emphasize that the forest plans are completely strategic. They do not make project level decisions, nor do they compel managers to implement specific actions or activities. Current uses are carried forward. Any changes made to existing uses or new proposals will be determined at the project level according to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. This concept is consistent with the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and with the agency policy of two decision levels: 1) strategic; and 2) project (site specific).</p>	<p>ROD, p. 21</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 18</p>
Mark Twain NF (2005)	This 2005 Forest Plan replaces all previous resource management plans for this Forest. It provides an integrated, interdisciplinary, programmatic framework for environmentally sound management based on the best available scientific information. The 2005 Forest Plan is permissive in that it allows, but does not mandate, certain projects and activities. Approval of the 2005 Forest Plan does not mandate any specific project decisions. Projects occur only after they are proposed, their environmental effects considered, and a decision is made authorizing site-specific action.	ROD, p. ROD-4
White Mountain NF (2005)	<p>The Revised Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement are programmatic in nature, providing a long-range strategy for the Forest.</p> <p>Site-specific environmental analysis will occur for each project needed to implement this strategy. Any resulting project documents will be tiered to the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Revised Plan, pursuant to 40 CFR 1508.28.</p> <p>The decision here does not directly authorize any new activities or projects, but rather activities and projects will be subject to additional site-specific environmental analysis that will tier to the Final Environmental Impact Statement and follow applicable environmental analysis, public involvement, and administrative appeal procedures.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 7</p> <p>ROD, p. 7</p> <p>ROD, p. 38</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
White Mountain NF (cont.) (2005)	The Revised Plan provides broad, strategic, landscape-level direction for managing the White Mountain National Forest. Working toward the desired conditions and achieving the objectives in the Revised Plan will be accomplished through site-specific project decisions, using the appropriate analyses and processes to meet the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and other laws and regulations. The Revised Plan itself makes no project-level decisions.	ROD, p. 45

Appeal decisions for the reviewed plan RODs reinforce the relationship between a plan's strategic framework and site-specific projects or activities. The Chief of the Forest Service prefaced his appeal decisions of plan revisions by describing the revised plan's framework for decision-making and its relationship to future project decisions. Following is an excerpt from the 2005 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) Revision Appeal Decision that illustrates this relationship for two levels of decision-making:

*The National Forest LRMP at issue in this appeal is a programmatic framework for management of the Payette NF, an administrative unit of the National Forest System. An LRMP establishes direction for all future decisions within the planning area, consistent with the NFMA requirement to use an "interdisciplinary approach to achieve integrated consideration of physical, biological, economic and other sciences" (16 USC 1604(b), (f), (g) and (i)) . . . Approval of the Payette National Forest LRMP does not mandate any project decisions. Projects occur only after they are proposed, their effects on the environment considered, and a decision is made to carry out the project.*

## Specific Decisions Included in some Reviewed RODs

**Conclusion:** *Several of the reviewed RODs contained specific decisions that would not normally be included in development, revision, or amendment of land management plans under the 2005 planning rule. However, those specific decisions were identified and their effects analyzed in the plan FEIS, allowing those specific decisions.*

Nine of the twenty RODs made decisions in addition to the management direction described in the “Nature of Planning and Need for Site-Specific Analysis” section. Seven of the nine RODs identified lands that were available for oil and gas leasing. The other two RODs prohibited specific activities: motorized cross-country travel and boat use on a specific river segment. The Environmental Consequences chapters in these nine plan FEISs analyzed the effects of each of these specific decisions.

These types of decisions typically will not be made in plans under the 2005 planning rule. The following table summarizes the specific decisions authorized in nine of the twenty RODs.

**Table 4. Specific project decisions in reviewed RODs**

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Decision Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF (1998)	Approximately 53 percent of the available oil and gas leasing acres in Alternative B would allow occupancy under the leasing stipulations with my decision. The remaining 47 percent would be available with no surface occupancy.	ROD, p. 21
National Forests in Florida (1999)	This is one of the more controversial issues and the most difficult to address. Forest access policy relates to allowable travel by pedestrians, horses, and motorized and nonmotorized vehicles. . . . The current permissive access policy has resulted in a maze of crisscrossing roads and travelways. Effects include user conflicts, erosion, compaction, and rutting of soils, and disturbance of sensitive wildlife species including ground-nesting birds, Florida black bears, and nesting vultures and wading birds. In order to reduce these adverse impacts, the Revised Forest Plan prohibits cross-country travel by motorized vehicles and bicycles. This prohibition of cross-country travel is to be effective immediately upon approval of the Revised Forest Plan.	ROD, p. 19-20
Dakota Prairie Grasslands (2002)	I am making the “administratively Available” decision (decision 7) under 36 CFR 228.102 (d) about oil and gas resources . . . The “leasing decision for specific lands” decision required under 36 CFR 228.102 (e) will be deferred to a later date under a separate ROD	ROD, p. 15
Nebraska NF (2002)	I have decided to make 187,390 acres of the Oglala and Buffalo Gap National Grassland administratively available for oil and gas leasing. Immediately after this decision, the Forest Supervisor will make the leasing decision for specific lands (36 CFR 228.102 (e)) . . .	ROD, p. 4
White River NF (2002)	I am affirming the decisions [lands available for oil and gas leasing, and lands authorized for oil and gas leasing] made in the ROD for the White River National Forest Oil and Gas Leasing EIS (May 26, 1993) with the changes described below . . . This ROD adjusts those leasing decisions by reducing the lands available for leasing by approximately 90,700 acres.	ROD, p. 28
Medicine Bow NF (2004)	While Plan decisions are generally programmatic, this decision also incorporates the following decisions . . .  The leasing decision for specific lands [36 CFR 228.102(e)] that have been designated as administratively available for oil and gas leasing [36 CFR 228.102(d)]...	ROD, p. 1
Daniel Boone NF (2004)	My decision includes two area specific decisions. The first is to make all lands within the Daniel Boone National Forest, except approximately 17,400 acres of federally owned minerals identified in this EIS, administratively available for oil and gas leasing [36 CFR 228.102(d)]. The second decision is to authorize (consent) the Bureau of Land Management to offer those specific lands for lease [36 CFR 228.102 (e)].	ROD, p. 5

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Decision Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Jefferson NF (2004)	I am also making the decision in the Forest Plan: 528,400 acres where I consent to lease for Federal oil and gas development and exploration. (36 CFR 228.102(e)). This includes 195,900 acres with a no surface occupancy stipulation [in Cave Springs] and 140, 500 acres with controlled surface use and timing stipulations.	ROD, pp. 3 and 10
Sumter NF <sup>24</sup> (2004)	There currently are adequate opportunities for “creek boating” experiences in the area, including the Chattooga River, therefore I concluded that continuing to exclude boating above Highway 28 is the best way to protect and enhance the outstandingly remarkable values associated with the entire Chattooga River for the next 10-15 years.	ROD, p. 13

## **Descriptions of Decisions that will typically not be included in plans under the 2005 planning rule**

### *Oil and Gas Leasing Decisions*

Oil and gas leasing under 36 CFR 228.102 is a multistage decision process. The first step is the leasing analysis (36 CFR 228.102 ) that results in a decision that determines whether lands are available for oil and gas leasing on a forest wide or area-specific basis. Oil and gas leasing may only occur on lands identified as available. The USDA Forest Service regulations implementing the Federal Offshore Oil and Gas Leasing Reform Act (FOOGLRA) direct the agency to prepare a NEPA analysis that analyzes reasonably foreseeable development scenarios. The Forest Service Responsible Official then notifies the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) of the lands available for leasing (36 CFR 228.102 (d)).

The FOOGLRA implementing regulations make clear that the leasing analysis may be conducted as part of, or independent of approval of the plan, plan amendment, or plan revision (36 CFR 229.102). NFMA directs that plans address the renewable, surface, multi-use resources of the National Forest System. Oil and gas is, of course, a non-renewable, subsurface resource and leasing availability analysis need not be part of the land management planning process, but may be incorporated if deemed an efficient and appropriate in the judgment of the responsible official with the appropriate NEPA analysis.

The actual lease offer and sale is made by the BLM through its competitive leasing process after the USDA Forest Service confirms that the proposed lease parcel stipulations adequately address environmental concerns, NEPA, the Endangered Species Act, and are consistent with the applicable plan. Finally, subsequent analysis is conducted when a leaseholder submits a proposed Surface Use Plan of Operations as a part of its Application for Permit to Drill prior to ground-disturbing activities. Generally, such an environmental analysis evaluates the specific potential impacts of proposed drill sites and associated

<sup>24</sup> This particular decision is under litigation (see *American Whitewater v. Bosworth*, No. 2:06-CV-0074 (N.D. Ga. Filed May 1, 2006))

activities (36 CFR 228.107). Additionally, following successful exploration activities, field developments may be proposed which may require further analysis.

***Travel Management: Designated Routes and Areas for Motor Vehicle Use***

Travel management decisions are another type of project and activity decision that typically will not be made in land management plans under the 2005 rule. On November 9, 2005, the Forest Service published a new rule<sup>25</sup> for providing motor vehicle access to national forests and grasslands. The rule requires each national forest and grassland to designate those roads, trails, and areas that are open to motor vehicle use. Over the next few years, individual national forests/grasslands and ranger districts will decide which roads, trails, and areas to designate for motor vehicle use. This is a public process. The effects of these designations will be analyzed in an appropriate NEPA document.

**Effects Analysis Based on Hypothetical Projects and Activities**

***Conclusion:*** *Most of the environmental analysis in the reviewed plan FEISs focused on hypothetical projects and activities. Several reviewed FEISs described effects as being related to a plan's management direction, but often, the effects are actually related to hypothetical projects and activities under various plan alternatives. Other times the effects are related to management area prescriptions (including special areas) that included specific prohibitions in the form of standards.*

All of the reviewed FEISs disclosed and compared effects based on projected implementation of alternatives (i.e., estimated projects and activities). This analysis complies with the 1982 rule requirement to estimate and compare the “effects of implementing each alternative.”<sup>26</sup> For the reviewed FEISs, various budget scenarios were often used to approximate the levels of projects and outcomes for alternatives. The Forest Service did not know whether any of the hypothetical projects would occur (see “Management Direction Applied to Projects or Activities” section below). Given the plan’s strategic framework (see “Nature of Land Management Planning and Need for Site-Specific Planning” section above), these hypothetical projects and activities were not compelled by the plan and there were no commitments in the plan to undertake the identified hypothetical projects and activities. Thus, no actual effects occurred from approval of the plan revision; unless there were prohibitions in the form of standards that were implemented immediately, often by the use of closure orders.

Following are excerpts describing how the reviewed plan FEISs and/or RODs characterized effects in analyzing the projected implementation of alternatives.

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<sup>25</sup> 70 FR 68264

<sup>26</sup> 36 CFR 219.12 (g), September 30, 1982, as amended

**Table 5. Reviewed ROD/FEIS excerpts describing how the effects analysis was conducted**

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Francis-Marion NF (1996)	<p>Those projects recognized in the implementation guides and strategies in Appendix A and in the list of probable management activities listed on pages S-3 and S-4 are projections of probable outcomes which were used to estimate the environmental effects of each alternative.</p> <p>Environmental consequences are the result of activities scheduled to implement the alternatives for managing the Forest over the planning horizon. The level of activities (therefore the level of environmental effects) differs among the alternatives.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 31</p> <p>FEIS, p. IV-1</p>
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF (1998)	<p>Budgets prepared for each alternative at two funding levels helped to project actual outcomes and practical results. Historically, the Forest Service has not received the funds necessary to fully implement its forest plans. The budgets were allocated between programs based on the theme of each alternative, the expected goods and services provided, and the necessary actions and expenditures required to deliver those goods and services.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 15
Routt NF (1998)	<p>Each alternative estimates levels of activities and corresponding outcomes or outputs. Table S-2 displays the estimated activities, outputs, and effects for each alternative. The desired condition level reflects the full implementation budget level for decade 1. Activities and outcomes at the experienced budget level are displayed for decades 1 and 5.</p> <p>Potential effects on these existing security blocks by alternative were estimated by considering projected increases or decreases in road miles, acres harvested, roadless acres, and projected levels of habitat effectiveness.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 16</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 132</p>
Kisatchie NF (1999)	<p>These projects do not represent all foreseeable recreation construction projects; only those for which a need has been identified for accomplishment during the next 10-year period. Ideally — and at optimum funding levels, all the projects would be accomplished. Actual funding during the period is unlikely to support all the projects.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 4, p. 4-77
National Forests in Florida (1999)	<p>Those projects recognized in the implementation guides and strategies in the Revised Forest Plan in Chapter 5 and in the probable outputs listed in Appendix F, “Summary of Allocations, Outputs, and Budget,” are projections of probable outcomes that were used to indicate approximate scheduling and practices and estimate environmental effects of each alternative.</p>	ROD, p. 32

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Dakota Prairie Grasslands (2002)	<p>The Grasslands Supervisor and District Rangers will consider many new proposed activities during the life of this plan. Site-specific analyses will be done before approving these activities to insure they are compliant with the goals, objectives, and standards and guides of the revised plan. The outcomes specified in the Revised Grasslands Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p> <p>This section describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the environment resulting from activities associated with the alternatives. Direct environmental effects are those that occur at the same time and place as the initial action. An example would be on-site soil compaction from trail use . . . Most effects described would probably occur over the next 10 to 15 years; however, some resources, such as timber management, do make longer term projections.</p> <p>The cumulative effects of the alternatives on soil were evaluated in terms of the amount of soil disturbed by any number of activities, the miles of new roads and trails developed, oil, gas, and mineral development, grazing use, timber harvest, and areas projected for prescribed burning. All these activities have potential adverse effects.</p>	<p>ROD, p. 40</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-287</p>
Nebraska NF (2002)	<p>The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed above, these activities are site-specific and require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outcomes specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p> <p>This section describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects to the environment resulting from activities associated with the alternatives. Direct environmental effects are those that occur at the same time and place as the initial action. An example would be on-site soil compaction from trail use . . . Most effects described would probably occur over the next 10 to 15 years; however, some resources, such as timber management, do make longer term projections.</p> <p>The cumulative effects of the alternatives on soil were evaluated in terms of the amount of soil disturbed by any number of activities, the miles of new roads and trails developed, oil, gas, and mineral development, grazing use, timber harvest, and areas projected for prescribed burning. All these activities have potential adverse effects</p>	<p>ROD, p. 42</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-287</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
White River NF (2002)	<p>The purpose of this chapter is to describe the physical, biological, and social environments of the White River National Forest, and to convey how each of the alternatives will affect these environments . . . We review the current conditions of each resource . . . followed by . . . an analysis of the effects of the alternatives due to differences in management emphasis, management area prescription allocations, management activities, and projected outcomes.</p> <p>The discussion of environmental consequences focuses on the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the environment that are likely to result from activities and resource output levels of each alternative.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2</p>
Chugach NF (2002)	<p>The primary criteria used to evaluate the eight alternatives and determine their impact on fisheries and aquatic habitat (relative risk ranking) include miles of proposed roads, acres of proposed harvest, areas of increased intense recreation, and amount of fisheries habitat restoration and improvement.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 2-28</p>
Boise NF (2003)	<p>The modeling and analysis conducted for this EIS are intended and designed to indicate relative differences between the alternatives, rather than to predict absolute amounts of activities, outputs, or effects . . . The Forest Plans and the EIS alternatives do not authorize implementation of management activities described in the effects analysis.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-12</p>
Boise NF (cont.) (2003)	<p>Another key assumption is that MPCs provide an indication of the management goals (i.e., desired outcomes) that subsequent site-specific projects would strive to meet or move toward. Neither the Forest Plans, or the EIS alternatives, or the MPCs authorize implementation of management activities described in the effects analysis . . . The MPC-based effects analyses compare potential effects from various management activities that could occur under various combinations of MPCs represented by the alternatives. These effects are modeled based on assumptions about the type, amount, and intensity of management activities that would be allowed or emphasized under each MPC. As stated above, the modeled effects in the EIS are designed to show relative differences in alternatives – not to accurately predict the amount or location of management activities that would occur during the planning period.</p> <p>The SPECTRUM model used management actions to change the forested vegetation to achieve the DFCs for each alternative based on the MPCs assigned to reflect the intent and theme of the alternatives. The management actions contain different sets of activities that are applied to the analysis units . . . These activities have different costs, occur at different timing sequences, produce different effects on the landscape . . . Activities occur at the mid-point of the decade.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-155</p> <p>FEIS, Appendix B (Analysis Process), p. B-31</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Payette NF (2003)	<p>The modeling and analysis conducted for this EIS are intended and designed to indicate relative differences between the alternatives, rather than to predict absolute amounts of activities, outputs, or effects . . . The Forest Plans and the EIS alternatives do not authorize implementation of management activities described in the effects analysis.</p> <p>Another key assumption is that MPCs [Management Prescription Categories] provide an indication of the management goals (i.e., desired outcomes) that subsequent site-specific projects would strive to meet or move toward. Neither the Forest Plans, or the EIS alternatives, or the MPCs authorize implementation of management activities described in the effects analysis . . . The MPC-based effects analyses compare potential effects from various management activities that could occur under various combinations of MPCs represented by the alternatives. These effects are modeled based on assumptions about the type, amount, and intensity of management activities that would be allowed or emphasized under each MPC. As stated above, the modeled effects in the EIS are designed to show relative differences in alternatives – not to accurately predict the amount or location of management activities that would occur during the planning period.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-12</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-155</p>
Payette NF (cont.) (2003)	<p>The SPECTRUM model used management actions to change the forested vegetation to achieve the DFCs for each alternative based on the MPCs assigned to reflect the intent and theme of the alternatives. The management actions contain different sets of activities that are applied to the analysis units . . . These activities have different costs, occur at different timing sequences, produce different effects on the landscape . . . Activities occur at the mid-point of the decade.</p>	<p>FEIS, Appendix B (Analysis Process), p. B-31</p>
Uinta NF (2003)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acres of anticipated timber harvest</li> <li>• Acres of anticipated vegetation management other than timber harvest and burning . . .</li> </ul> <p>The precise amounts of soil compaction, puddling, displacement, burning, and organic matter loss that might occur are subject to a wide range of site-specific and project-specific variables. It is not feasible to accurately quantify these impacts in this programmatic document; however, these impacts can be qualitatively described, and the Key Indicators listed earlier in this section can be used to quantitatively indicate the relative potential impacts on geology and soils. To allow comparison of the alternatives, estimates of the acreage of impacted soils were developed.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-10</p>

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
	<p>Forest plan budget projections are not one of the six decisions made in forest plans; however, budgets must be considered in developing forest plans. Budgets affect the activities and rate of implementation, and these in turn affect the expected and projected environmental consequences of implementing the various alternatives.</p> <p>The following tables portray 1) an estimate of projected activities and average annual outputs that might occur during implementation of the various alternatives, and 2) an estimate of a budget that might be needed to implement these activities and achieve these outputs. These outputs were not constrained to a specific budget level, but were developed considering funding levels received during Fiscal Years 1997-2002.</p>	FEIS, Appendix H
Medicine Bow NF (2004)	<p>Although a Plan is not a budget document, budget estimates have been prepared for each alternative at two funding levels to project activities and outcomes; desired budget level and experienced budget level...The budget estimates were allocated among programs based on the theme of each alternative, the expected activities and outcomes, and supporting program expenditures to deliver the activities and outcomes.</p> <p>This section describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the environment resulting from activities. It also describes output levels for the alternatives.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 2-3  FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2
Medicine Bow NF (cont.) (2004)	<p>Step 6 – Estimated Effects of Alternatives</p> <p>The physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing each alternative considered in detail were estimated and compared according to NEPA procedures.</p> <p>Step 7 – Evaluation of Alternatives</p> <p>Significant physical, biological, economic, and social effects of implementing alternatives were evaluated.</p>	FEIS, Appendix B (Description of the Analysis), p. B-3
Chattahoochee – Oconee NF (2004)	<p>The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p> <p>After each discussion of the current condition of a resource, the potential effects (environmental consequences) associated with implementation of each alternative are discussed. All significant or potentially significant effects — including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects — are disclosed.</p>	ROD, p. 27  FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
	<p>For estimating the effects of alternatives at the programmatic Forest Plan level, the assumption has been made that the kinds of resource management activities allowed under the prescriptions will, in fact, occur to the extent necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of each alternative. However, the actual location, design, and extent of such activities are generally not known at this time. Those will be site specific (project-by-project) decisions. Thus, the discussions here refer to the potential for the effect to occur, realizing that in many cases, these are only estimates. The effects analysis is useful in comparing and evaluating alternatives on a Forestwide basis, but is not to be applied to specific locations on the Forests.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2
Daniel Boone NF (2004)	<p>This chapter offers an overview, by resource program, of the affected environment and the differing environmental effects likely to result from implementation of an alternative. The affected environment includes the existing physical, biological, and socioeconomic components that may be changed by implementation of an alternative . . . While not specifically identified in this chapter, irreversible and irretrievable commitments of resources are factors in any analysis of environmental effects. Such commitments are usually made at the project level rather than the programmatic level of a Forest Plan.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1
Jefferson NF (2004)	<p>The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions.</p>	ROD, p. 39
Sumter NF (2004)	<p>After each discussion of the current condition of a resource, the potential effects (environmental consequences) associated with implementation of each alternative are discussed. All significant or potentially significant effects—including direct, indirect, and cumulative effects—are disclosed. Where possible, the effects are quantified. Where this is not possible, a qualitative discussion is presented.</p> <p>For estimating the effects of alternatives at the programmatic forest plan level, the assumption has been made that the kinds of resource management activities allowed under the prescriptions will in fact occur to the extent necessary to achieve the goals and objectives of each alternative. However, the actual locations, design, and extent of such activities are generally not known at this time. That will be a site-specific (project-by-project) decision. It is also unsure if the budgets needed to implement the specific activities will be forthcoming. Thus, the discussions here refer to the potential for the effect to occur, realizing that in many cases, these are only estimates. The effects analysis is useful in comparing and evaluating alternatives on a forestwide basis but is not to be applied to specific locations on the forest.</p>	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Cleveland NF (2005)	<p>The FEIS includes information that is the basis for determining what components of the current land management plans need change, alternative ways to accomplish the change, and the estimated effects of implementing each of the alternatives.</p> <p>This section discusses the direct and indirect effects that can generally be expected when activities are implemented for each resource area.</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1</p> <p>FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 2</p>
Mark Twain NF (2005)	<p>The Final Environmental Impact Statement for the 2005 Forest Plan did consider and evaluate the total management program that likely would be necessary to implement the objectives of the 2005 Forest Plan. It also dealt with those issues and concerns relevant at a larger landscape or forest-wide level. Therefore, in essence, the Final Environmental Impact Statement is itself a cumulative effects document, because it analyzed the total of activities that may be expected in the first decade (and longer term) and disclosed the forest-wide effects of those activities considered in total.</p>	<p>ROD, p. ROD-31</p>
White Mountain NF (2005)	<p>This publication, the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), documents the potential effects of applying each alternative on the physical, biological, and social environment. This intensive study gave the Regional Forester the information necessary to decide which alternative provided the best balance...</p>	<p>FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-3</p>

Ten of the twenty reviewed plan FEISs also described environmental effects that were attributed to following types of management direction:

1. “Standards and guidelines”,
2. “Management area allocations,”
3. “Management area prescriptions,”
4. “Management area categories,”
5. “Management direction,” or
6. An alternative’s “management emphasis.”

These FEISs stated that the described effects relate to the management direction. However, the identified effects typically related to the possible effects of hypothetical projects and activities. The design features assigned to the hypothetical projects and activities determined what management direction was applied and considered in the effects analysis.

In some instances, the effects were related to management area prescriptions (including special areas) that included specific prohibitions or restrictions in the form of standards. Sometimes such prohibitions or restrictions, such as travel management decisions, were carried out immediately using a closure order in reliance on the analysis in the FEIS. Other times subsequent NEPA analysis would evaluate the effects of the prohibition or restriction. Prohibitions typically will not be included in plan components under the 2005 planning rule. If such prohibitions are necessary, the portion of the plan component that contains prohibitions would be analyzed as appropriate under NEPA.

Following are samples of plan FEIS wording that could be interpreted as describing the effects of a plan’s management direction, followed by an explanation of how the effects are actually related to projects and activities.

**Dakota Prairie Grassland Final Plan FEIS (Effects from Travel Management and Motorized Use, p. 3-329)**

The following is an example of “plan effects” discussion.

Travel management has both beneficial and adverse effects on recreation. Restrictions on motorized travel would benefit people who prefer non-motorized recreation such as hiking, horseback riding, walk-in hunting and backcountry camping. Restrictions limit those who prefer motorized opportunities such as driving for pleasure, motorized camping, off-road driving and motorized hunting access. Limiting motorized activities could ultimately provide better hunting opportunities as wildlife security is improved. On the other hand, motorized travel restrictions make it more difficult to gather grassland and forest products, retrieve game and sightsee. In addition, travel restrictions may make it more difficult for elderly or disabled people to access public lands.

Alternatives 1 and 2 generally do not restrict motorized use. Essentially, Alternatives DEIS 3, FEIS 3, 4 and 5 restrict motorized traffic to existing routes. As such, off-highway motorized recreation would be affected and would be more limited under Alternatives DEIS 3, FEIS 3, 4 and 5 than in Alternatives 1 and 2. For further information, see the

Driving for Pleasure and the Travel Management sections in this chapter.

***Comments***

In this example, the Responsible Official made a final decision to immediately restrict or limit motorized activities in the plan revision ROD. In this example, Alternatives DEIS 3, FEIS 3, 4, and 5 contained management direction to restrict motorized traffic to existing routes. The FEIS disclosed the effects associated with the projected implementation of each alternative; that is, how the management direction is applied to future motorized travel use. Therefore, the FEIS was discussing the effects of the management direction itself. Plans under the 2005 rule will not typically contain such restrictions; such decisions will typically be made subsequent to the plan revision or plan amendment and include appropriate NEPA analysis.

**Boise National Forest Final Plan FEIS (Potential Effects from Management Prescription Categories (MPCs) and Uses on Recreation Resources, p. 3-145)**

The following is an example of “plan effects” discussion.

This level of use is generally not expected to vary much by alternative, as described in the Recreation Resources section in Chapter 3. The exception to this is motorized recreation use, which would be prohibited in recommended wilderness areas under Alternatives 4 and 6. This indicator is used to display effects by alternative for Issue 4 in the Direct and Indirect Effects section below.

While impacts do not vary by alternative significantly, they do vary between subbasins. Subbasins with more recreation sites, trails, and roads in RCAs have a greater potential impacts to SWRA resources . . . Effects in high activity subbasins have the potential to be in conflict more with SWRA resources. Futhermore, where there is greater use, there is a greater potential for temporary and short-term effects from disturbance to fish/redds, stream bank trampling, wood, sediment, and loss of riparian vegetation.

***Comments***

In this example, the Responsible Official made a final decision to immediately restrict or limit motorized activities. In this case, the alternatives’ management direction contained an array of motorized recreation restrictions that differ by alternative. The FEIS disclosed the effects associated with the projected implementation of each alternative; that is, how the management direction is applied to the future recreation motorized use within the Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic (SWRA) resources. Therefore, the FEIS discussed effects of the management direction itself. Plans under the 2005 rule will not typically contain such restrictions; such decisions will typically be made subsequent to the plan revision or plan amendment and include appropriate NEPA analysis. .

**Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forest Final Plan FEIS (Aquatic Resources Direct and Indirect Effects Potential Effects, p. 3-247 to 3-248)**

The following is an example of “plan effects” discussion.

The Plan designates riparian corridors for perennial and intermittent streams and common standards for channeled ephemeral streams. The riparian corridor will be managed to retain, restore, and/or enhance the inherent ecological processes and functions of the associated aquatic, riparian, and upland components within the corridor in all alternatives. These standards and guidelines may have a beneficial effect on the communities and their associated species.

When projects are implemented with full consideration of the Riparian Corridor Prescription and channeled ephemeral stream standards, no direct or indirect adverse effects to aquatic organisms or to the aquatic habitat that sustain them will occur.

***Comments***

In this case, the alternatives’ management direction contained common standards for channeled ephemeral streams and a management prescription for riparian corridors. This excerpt pointed out that the management direction (i.e., Riparian Corridor Prescription) is applied when projects are implemented. Future projects occurring within these riparian areas would consider the management prescription and the channeled ephemeral streams standards during the design phase. The FEIS disclosed the effects associated with the projected implementation of each alternative; that is, how the management direction is applied to the hypothetical recreation motorized use within these riparian areas. The FEIS projected that projects using this management direction would not have any adverse effects. Therefore, the FEIS is discussing effects of the hypothetical future activities using the management direction, not the effects of the management direction itself.

**Mark Twain National Forest Final Plan FEIS (Terrestrial Natural Communities Direct and Indirect Effects, Alternative 1, p. 3-80)**

The following is an example of “plan effects” discussion.

Domestic livestock grazing on glades in MP 1.1 and 1.2 would be discontinued upon expiration of allotment permits. There would be three primary effects as a result of closing these allotments. First, the probable vectors for spreading serious non-native invasive plant species such as crown vetch, sericea lespedeza and knapweed would be removed. Second the likelihood of plant diversity recovery, especially sensitive species, would be improved by reducing the chance that few remaining sensitive plant populations are either trampled or browsed. Finally, the restoration of the former extremely shallow organic soil layer would enhance recovery of more mesic plant species.

***Comments***

In this example, the Responsible Official made a final decision to specifically prohibit livestock grazing. In this case, the Responsible Official chose prescriptions for Management Areas 1.1 and 1.2, which prohibit future livestock grazing on natural

communities of glades and woodlands and in riparian management zones. This excerpt projected the possible outcomes when domestic livestock grazing permits expired and grazing was discontinued in these particular areas. The FEIS described three primary projected effects from expired livestock grazing permits. Plans under the 2005 rule will not typically predetermine the discontinuation of an existing use in this manner. Such decisions will be made subsequent to the plan revision or plan amendment and include appropriate NEPA analysis.

**Boise, Payette, Sawtooth NFs Forest Plans EIS** (*wolf effects based on road miles related to vegetative management by alternative plans FEIS p 3-296*)

The following is an example of "plan effect" discussion.

Additional management direction will contribute to the viability and persistence of this species with the Ecogroup area . . . Wolf interaction with humans is perhaps most influenced by human accessibility to remote habitats. Under all alternatives, the amount of roads across the Ecogroup is expected to decrease over the short term (10-15 years), although small amounts of new road construction would also occur. Forest-wide direction will implement access restrictions if breeding pairs drop below the objective of six (6) breeding pairs as directed by the special rule.

The above discussion is based on Objective TEOB18 from Page III-9 of the Boise National Forest Plan Revision that states

“Work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Nez Perce Tribe and, when appropriate, the State to meet the experimental/non-essential population rules if wolf breeding pair populations’ drop below six pairs in the Central Idaho Recovery Area (from the approved FEIS for Gray Wolf Re-introduction: USDI U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1994).

### ***Comments***

In this example, the Responsible Official made a final decision to prohibit motorized activities in the plan revision ROD under certain conditions. In this case, the alternatives’ management direction would restrict human access to areas when wolf breeding pairs drop below six pairs. The FEIS disclosed the effects of decreased roads over 10-15 years including access restrictions if breeding pairs drop below the objective of six (6) breeding pairs. Plans under the 2005 rule will not typically contain such restrictions; such decisions will typically be made subsequent to the plan revision or plan amendment and include appropriate NEPA analysis. .

**Boise, Payette, Sawtooth NFs Forest Plans EIS** (Wolverine effects by alternative plans 3-303)

The following is an example of "plan effect" discussion.

Direction proposed under all action alternatives would mitigate management actions within known denning sites of sensitive species if those actions would disrupt the reproductive success of those sites during the nesting or denning period. Management direction will contribute to habitat conditions for viability and persistence of this species. This direction would need to be added to the Forest Plans under the No Action Alternative for 1B to provide the same level of protection.

The Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests Revised Forest Plans (Boise Forest Plan, page III-27) include standard WIST03 as follows:

“Mitigate management actions within known nesting or denning sites of MIS or Sensitive species if those actions would disrupt the reproductive success of those sites during the nesting or denning period. Sites, periods, and mitigation measures shall be determined during project planning.”

***Comments***

In this case, the Responsible Official made a decision to include standard WIST03 that would apply in Wolverine denning areas. The management direction was to mitigate actions that could disrupt wolverine reproductive success. Future projects within known denning sites would consider the standard WIST03 during the design phase and develop site specific mitigation measures. The FEIS disclosed potential effects from applying the management direction as mitigation to hypothetical management actions. The FEIS projected that projects using this management direction will contribute to habitat conditions for viability and persistence of this species. Therefore, the FEIS discussed the beneficial effects of applying the management direction to hypothetical management actions, not the effects of the management direction itself.

**Boise, Payette, Sawtooth NFs Forest Plans EIS** (*Percentage of forest treated by fire use by alternative 3-656 – 3-659*)

The following is an example of "plan effect" discussion.

Over the first 5 decades, Alternative 4, followed by 6, treated the most forested acres on the Boise and Payette Forests, while on the Sawtooth; Alternative 7 treated the most area with fire (Table FM-4). On all three Forests, Alternative 5 treated the least. Alternative percentages fell in the same order for the Boise and Payette; the order on the Sawtooth was different than the other two Forests. Desired conditions and the hazard reduction goals in Alternatives 2 through 7 are primary drivers for

determining vegetative management treatments. MPCs define the mix of mechanical-fire use that occurs. These factors, in concert with each other, determine the amount of fire that results as an outcome of the modeling for each alternative.

### ***Comments***

In this example, the Responsible Official did not make a final decision to immediately authorize any project or activity to treat forested acres (see Table 4 in this report). Rather, the Responsible Official did include management direction in the plan revision ROD that was drawn from and evaluated in the FEIS discussion of alternatives. In this case, the alternatives' management direction provided the desired conditions and hazard reduction goals for future management considerations. This management direction differed by alternative, thus resulting in different levels of hypothetical projects or activities to treat forested acres. These hypothetical projects or activities were then modeled as part of estimating the implementation of each alternative. The FEIS did not analyze the effects of the management direction itself. Plans under the 2005 rule will not contain alternatives and projected projects and activities.

Vegetation treatments by prescribed fire use are projects or activities authorized through project-level NEPA analysis. Such treatments will be analyzed and authorized when the exact project location and timing become known. The plan's management direction would be applied at the time each of these projects or activities is being designed.

## **Management Direction Applied to Projects or Activities**

***Conclusion:*** *The reviewed RODs and FEISs point out that a future projects' site-specific effects will depend on the project design, the environmental conditions of the specific location, and the application of the plan's standards and guidelines. It is at this point that effects occur and can be meaningfully evaluated.*

The reviewed RODs and FEISs typically described the application of the revised plan's management direction to subsequent site-specific projects. The reviewed RODs and FEISs focused mostly on the use and timing of the plans' management direction – specifically when projects are designed, analyzed, and documented in a site-specific NEPA process. Also, the reviewed RODs and FEISs stated how management direction, as applied to hypothetical projects and activities, might mitigate effects. This management direction was described for each alternative in the FEIS and was applied to hypothetical projects and activities to estimate the alternatives' implementation. Therefore, a plan's management direction is not employed until a specific project or activity implementing the plan is proposed, unless it is an authorization, prohibition, or restriction on specific projects or activities. The environmental effects of individual projects will depend on the project's design, the environmental conditions at each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines to each project.

Following are excerpts from 14 of the 20 reviewed RODs/FEISs that demonstrate this disclosure.

**Table 6. Reviewed ROD/FEIS excerpts describing how management direction is applied to projects and activities**

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Arapaho-Roosevelt NF (1998)	This FEIS is a “programmatic document.” It discloses the environmental consequences of the rules and policies that govern the use of resources contained in the <i>Forest Plan</i> and applicable at a forest level of analysis. It doesn’t not describe or predict the environmental consequences (or their timing) for applications of the standards and guidelines at individual site-specific projects. Those finer-scale determinations of environmental consequences for site-specific projects depend on how the projects are implemented, the ways in which the standards and guidelines are applied to them individually and the actual environmental conditions at the specific sites.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 57
Routt NF (1998)	The standards and guidelines provide direction for management and ensure that resources are managed in a sustainable manner. They represent design criteria to ensure that projects implementing the Revised Plan move the Forest towards the desired outcomes expressed in the goals and objectives. The standards and guidelines allow those who work for the Forest and with the public to design and administer projects which accomplish Forest objectives.	ROD, p. 15
Kisatchie NF (1999)	Forestwide standards and guidelines require specific resource protection measures to be used during the implementation of project activities and must be met in all situations regardless of which management prescription is used.	FEIS, Chapter 2, p. 2-16
National Forests in Florida (1999)	The Revised Forest Plan will be implemented through a series of project-level decisions based on site-specific environmental analysis and public involvement. The Revised Forest Plan seeks to guide determination of management activities and projects by establishing a clear desired future condition for the forest and for each management area, rather than by establishing schedules for actions.  Many of the standards and guidelines for the preferred alternative...serve to mitigate the effects of management.	ROD, p. 32  FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-1
Dakota Prairie Grasslands (2002)	Forest Plans set out management area prescriptions with standards and guidelines for future decision-making and are adjustable through monitoring and evaluation, amendment and revision.  The FEIS is a programmatic document; it discusses alternatives and effects for a broad program – overall management of a national grassland and forest unit. Environmental consequences for individual, site specific projects are not described. The environmental effects of individual projects will depend on the implementation of each project, the environmental conditions at each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines in each case.	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-9  FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-3
Nebraska NF (2002)	Forest Plans set out management area prescriptions with standards and guidelines for future decision-making and are adjustable through monitoring and evaluation, amendment and revision.	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-9

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
	The FEIS is a programmatic document; it discusses alternatives and effects for a broad program – overall management of a national grassland and forest unit. Environmental consequences for individual, site specific projects are not described. The environmental effects of individual projects will depend on the implementation of each project, the environmental conditions at each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines in each case.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-3
White River NF (2002)	This [FEIS] is a programmatic document. It discusses environmental effects on a broad scale . . . Because this document contains a forest-wide level of analysis, it does not predict what will happen when forest-wide standards and guidelines are implemented on individual, site-specific projects. Nor does it convey the long-term environmental consequences of any site-specific project. These actual effects will depend on the extent of each project, environmental conditions at the site (which can vary widely across the forest), mitigation measures, and their effectiveness.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-3
Chugach NF (2002)	This FEIS is a programmatic document. It discloses the environmental consequences at a large scale, at the planning level. This is in contrast to analyses for site-specific projects. These decisions are made after more detailed analysis and further public comment. The FEIS presents a programmatic action at the Forest level of analysis but does not predict what will happen each time the standards and guidelines are implemented. Environmental consequences for individual, site-specific projects on the Forest are not disclosed (except for access management). The environmental consequences of individual projects will depend on the implementation of each project, the environmental conditions of each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines in each case.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-2
Medicine Bow NF (2004)	This section describes the direct, indirect, and cumulative effects on the environment resulting from activities. It also describes output levels for the alternatives. The FEIS presents a programmatic action at a Forest level of analysis, but does not predict what will happen each time the standards and guidelines are implemented. Environmental consequences for individual, site specific projects on the Forest are not described. The environmental effects of individual projects will depend on the implementation of each project, the environmental conditions at each project location, and the application of the standards and guidelines in each case.	FEIS, Chapter 3, p. 3-5
Chattahoochee – Oconee NF (2004)	Forest plans do not compel the agency to undertake any site-specific projects; rather, they establish overall goals, objectives, and desired resource conditions that the individual national forest strives to meet. Forest plans also establish limitations on what actions may be authorized, and what conditions must be met as project decisions are made.	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-6

<i>Forest Service Unit (year revised)</i>	<i>Excerpt</i>	<i>Reference</i>
Daniel Boone NF (2004)	Forest Plans do not oblige the agency to undertake site-specific projects; rather, they establish overall Goals, Objectives, and Desired Future Conditions that individual national forests strive to meet. Forest Plans also set limitations on what actions may be authorized and what conditions must be met, during project decision-making... Any authorization of a site-specific project must comply with NEPA procedures.	FEIS, Chapter 1, p. 1-1
Jefferson NF (2004)	The standards set the sideboards for achieving the goals, objectives and desired conditions, as well as provide meaningful direction when implementing projects.	ROD, p. 39
Sumter NF (2004)	Standards, which set the sideboards for achieving the goals, objectives and desired conditions, as well as provide meaningful direction when implementing projects.	ROD, p. 3
Mark Twain NF (2005)	Because this document contains a Forest-wide level of analysis, it does not predict what will happen when Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines are implemented on individual, site specific projects. Nor does it convey the long-term environmental consequences of any site-specific project. These actual effects will depend on the extent of each project, environmental conditions at the site (which vary across the Forest), site-specific mitigation measures, and their effectiveness.	FEIS, Chapter 3, pp. 3-1 to 3-2

**Reviewer Credentials**

Reviewer	Title	Years of planning experience	
		NEPA	NFMA
<b>Dave Barone</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Deb Beighley</b>	<b>Appeals Specialist</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Joe Carbone</b>	<b>NEPA Coordinator</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Anthony Erba</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Karen Liu</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>Linda Parker</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Bruce Rene</b>	<b>Appeals Specialist</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Dennis Roy</b>	<b>Appeals Specialist</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Dave Sire</b>	<b>NEPA Specialist</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Garth Smelser</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Regis Terney</b>	<b>Land Management Planning Specialist</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Jean Thomas</b>	<b>Appeals Specialist</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Martha Twarkins</b>	<b>NEPA Specialist</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>19</b>