

USDA Forest Service National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule
Forest Service Washington Office, Yates Building
1400 Independence Ave, SW, Washington D.C.
March 8-9, 2016

Introduction

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (the Committee) held its fourteenth meeting from March 8-9, 2016 in Washington, DC.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to dialogue with agency leadership to explore key challenges and innovative approaches to gaining efficiencies in planning; update the Committee on work group progress; discuss the Tongass Draft Amendment; and continue to implement and refine the 2016 Work Plan.

Meeting Participants

- Committee members present: Mike Anderson, Susan Jane Brown, Robert Cope, James Magagna, Peter Nelson, Martin Nie, Thomas Troxel, Lindsay Warness, Russ Ehnes, William Barquin, Chris Topik, Joan May, Adam Cramer, Daniel Dessecker, Rodney Stokes, Candice Price, Greg Schaefer and Ray Vaughan
- Committee members absent: Vickie Roberts, Angela Sondenaa
- Agency Staff: Chris French-DFO, Mary Wagner, Meryl Harrell, Leslie Weldon, Brian Ferebee, Ann Acheson, Annie Goode, John Rupe, Robert Trujillo, Alix Cleveland, Jamie Barbour, Bob Davis, Linda Parker, Emily Weidner, Peter Gaulke, Ashley Goldhor-Wilcock, Tracy Tophooven, Regis Terney, Wendy Zirngibl, Frank Beum, Mark Bethke, Tania Ellersick, Kathryn Toffenetti, David Pivorunas, Caitlin Gregg
- Facilitators: Kathleen Rutherford and Pam Motley

Agreements and Actions

- 1. The Committee agreed to the draft 'Evaluation Checklist' with the changes discussed at this meeting.**
- 2. The Committee agreed to the draft wilderness recommendations on pre-assessment work with the changes discussed at this meeting.**
- 3. The next Committee meeting will be held in Charleston, SC on May 9-12.**

Introductions and Updates

Co-Chairs Susan Jane Brown and Rodney Stokes welcomed the members. The DFO noted that the Committee and agency are at a point where they are starting to see real learning with respect to implementation of the rule and the outcomes of the Committee's work on the directives. The agency is interested in discussing both large systemic challenges facing the agency and also deep conversations about specific issues pertaining to implementation.

Committee member introductions and updates-key observations from 2012 Rule Implementation

Committee members shared personal observations on implementation including concerns over: how the monitoring transitions are occurring; amending 1982 plans with the 2012 rule; how the public can participate in revisions without having to 'give their lives to it' with processes that require substantial participation for multiple years, including reading 1000+ page documents; objection processes that are not decreasing the potential for litigation; inconsistencies in the criteria being used to identify SCCs; how NRV is being used to develop desired conditions in light of insect, disease and fire; public misunderstanding of the wilderness process and initial inventory maps that set up unrealistic expectations on both sides; and an imbalance in public

participation – weighted towards those groups with paid staff. One member noted that the agency’s review of the SCC process was highly constructive and beneficial and has created good conversation. On-going evaluation of implementation will be key. Another member shared suggestions for implementation including: 1) The agency needs to create a schedule for revisions ahead of time to allow forests to prepare; 2) The agency needs to get serious about dedicating time and energy to revisions; Focused and well supported efforts will lead to better plans and shorter timeframes; 3) There is a need for better coordination among staff at the Washington Office (WO), Regional Office (RO) and forest-level; 4) The agency needs to broaden its partnerships and use of contracting, including outside facilitation for public meetings; 5) Planning documents need to be properly sized and organized to allow the public to review and effectively comment.

Dialogue with Agency Leadership regarding observations from implementation and innovative approaches to gaining efficiencies in planning

The group discussed observations from implementation and possible innovative approaches to planning. The purpose of this portion of the agenda was to enable the Committee and agency leadership to engage in conversations that are both frank and creative and to create space for exploration, not necessarily recommendations or commitments. To begin, work groups presented progress on on-going deliberations and draft work products.

Fire Work Group – Will develop a checklist for forests to facilitate incorporation of the Cohesive Strategy during plan revision. In particular, the checklist will emphasize the need for forests to work at a landscape-scale; seek better coordination with counties, tribes and private landowners; incorporate wildfire mitigation into desired conditions; and prioritize areas and projects (especially around communities). A draft checklist is expected to be completed at the conclusion of the May meeting, with the hope of full Committee review and discussion in the July or August meeting.

‘Evaluation Checklist’ Sub Group – Completed a draft series of questions that can be used by the agency to review and measure success of implementation, which was subsequently reviewed and adopted by the committee as a whole. The questions emphasize the intent of the rule and are based on the broad spectrum of interests that Committee members represent. This evaluation will provide information on potential key challenges and/or lessons being learned that can then inform future revision efforts, and further, they recommend that the agency compile and analyze the cumulative information gathered from each national forest that has completed a plan revision to best assess the success of the rule.

Adaptive Management Work Group – Is developing a rubric to evaluate plan components (desired conditions, standards and guidelines, objectives, goals and monitoring) in the context of setting up effective adaptive management. This will be used to review draft forest plans as they are made available. Findings will be explored and discussed in a proposed plan component writing workshop with Regional Planning Directors (RPDs) tentatively scheduled to coincide with the July 2016 FACA meeting.

Wilderness Work Group – Completed a draft recommendation on pre-assessment work which was subsequently reviewed and adopted by the committee as a whole. They are currently working to elaborate an approach for robust public involvement in all four steps of the process, the need for greater public outreach to better explain the process and manage expectations, the possibility of bundling steps, and potentially outsourcing parts of the process to partners to increase efficiencies. It was noted that wilderness tends to create interest and energy among the public and, when properly managed, this energy can be channeled into the rest of the revision process and subsequent management; just because the issue is controversial doesn’t mean it is bad. The wilderness work group will also revisit the Committee’s recommendations on the draft directives regarding public involvement in the wilderness process to assess if they have created unintended constraints and review the Carson NF’s wilderness process as a potential promising practice.

Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) Work Group – Completed a series of outreach conversations with stakeholders involved in revisions across the country to learn more about public perceptions of the SCC process. The Stakeholder Summary Report and agency’s SCC Enquiry Report highlight many similar issues. The majority of stakeholders voiced a desire for earlier identification of SCCs, enhanced transparency on rationale, better citation of BASI used for determinations, more clarification on the roles of the RO and forests, and greater consistency across units. In general the state and federal agency representatives were more understanding of the complexity of the task when compared to the general public. The group discussed that the current public anxiety may be a result of uncertainty in the process. Forests can decrease the uncertainty by clearly describing the process, operating in a transparent manner, and explicitly laying out the timeline and opportunities for public engagement.

Outreach Work Group – Is working on a draft list of promising practices, a draft list of key challenges observed in the field with recommendations to alleviate these issues, and an on-line and printable brochure to direct people towards the Citizens’ Guide. Draft recommendations will be shared with the full committee for review and discussion in the July or August 2016 meeting.

Agency leadership thanked the Committee for their hard work and noted the need for co-leadership and collaboration to capitalize on new legislation and authorities like the 2012 rule, Cohesive Strategy, Good Neighbor and CFLR. Ideally revisions should be seen as an opportunity to build relationships and foster civic engagement. The leadership acknowledged several current challenges to implementation and expressed interest in exploring how the agency, with its current capacity and funding, can truly implement the intent of the rule while also continuing to provide goods and services and increase the scale and pace of restoration. The WO is working to identify those areas and issues that require additional guidance and those areas that call for greater flexibility. The agency noted that the voluminous assessments and drawn out timelines may be due to forests’ and publics’ inability to embrace uncertainty and also the complexity of meeting the needs of those members of the public that desire volumes of supporting documents and those that want brief, clear and concise information.

The Committee is interested in continuing to explore how they can best assist the agency with implementation of the rule. Specifically, the Committee would like to delve deeper into: how forests can better engage urban and underserved communities; how to encourage the public to engage productively; the relationship between flexibility and consistency; how to improve communication between the WO, RO and forests; reality versus idealism in light of the agency’s budgetary and capacity constraints; sequencing and the criteria used to identify forests for revision; what shared ownership and shared decision-making look like; the inherent tension between internal decisions and the need to engage the public; and the problems created from protracted processes that attempt to pull everything together pre NEPA.

Possible solutions from Committee members to address current issues include: establishing forest-to-forest peer review of plans; using sustainability to connect the land and the people; using the Citizens’ Guide as a tool for members to reach out to their networks, demonstrating successful collaboration; moving NEPA forward to shorten timeframes and allow people to better see their input in the alternatives; using the (dis)functionality of the current plan as a basis for strategically structuring the assessment; involving tribes and local governments to a greater extent – including having representatives serve on ID teams; viewing revisions from both the architectural (big picture) and engineering (detail) perspective; taking an eco-regional approach to planning, congregating forests with similar ecology to increase efficiencies; creating a ‘incident commander center’ to increase communication within the agency; taking a different temporal approach – blurring the edges between the steps and components of the planning process so that multiple processes can be running simultaneously,

rather than thinking of it as linear; setting up a pilot effort that allows planners to experiment with developing plan components that support adaptive management; finding ways to intersect planning and CFLR; increasing capacity through partnerships; and taking a pause from initiating new revisions until lessons learned are captured.

In addition, several members emphasized the need to move from public comment to true public engagement. It is legitimate for stakeholders to want to understand decision-making processes used by the agency; the outcome can be determined by the agency, but the public has the right to understand the process. Forests need to manage public expectations by clearly describing the process at the outset and the structure of the decision-making process, including timelines. Several members suggested that forests add information to each planning document (including maps and draft SCC lists) that clearly explains who the audience is, the intent of the document (is this simply information-sharing or is the agency making decisions?), whether the agency is seeking feedback and, if so, in what form and the timeframe. This will help alleviate the concern of some publics that feel that they need to be involved in everything in order to have a voice. The group also discussed the balance between developing brief, structured assessments that tie to the need for change and the agency not wanting to be seen as pre-decisional.

Areas of Convergence – Moving Forward

The group noted that the 2012 rule is a sea change for the agency and is based on innovation yet is being implemented traditionally. Many questioned whether the agency's traditional structure is appropriate to implement the rule. The group discussed that 'form should follow function'; there is a need to turn planning on its head and allow the principles and aspirations of the rule to inform implementation. Along these lines, participants suggested restructuring ID teams by inviting Cooperating Agencies to serve on teams and constructing teams based on what is needed to implement the rule with titles such as (Ex: Citizen-Engager, Architect, Science-Harvester). The group also explored the ideas of co-leadership and shared decision-making and the possibility of learning from CFLR efforts. These themes will be further discussed at up-coming FACA meetings. In addition, the group discussed the possibility of the Committee creatively thinking through the entire planning process with RPDs and leadership in a virtual setting.

Standing Business

USFS Updates on Turnover, Video and Assessment Recommendations – The agency would like to further discuss how to formalize an approach for implementing Committee recommendations, including identifying the timeframe, potential barriers and opportunities to implementation.

- The agency reported that the turnover memo is currently in the clearance process. Once this is complete, the memo will be distributed to the field. RPDs are working with forests to better manage transitions. The turnover memo will also be delivered to forests during the orientation meeting between the WO and forests. The WO plans to facilitate a 'lessons learned' workshop between current revision forests and future revision forests, including the importance of managing turnover.
- Region 4 and the WO are working on videos for the public. The Committee will have the opportunity to give input on the national video. The Committee requested that the agency compile all of the videos that have been made thus far to show at the agency's 'lessons learned' workshop and also post them on-line for the public.
- The assessment recommendations have been posted to the FACA website and shared with the RPDs and planning teams. The WO will share the recommendations during the orientation meeting with new forests. The recommendations will also be included in a BMP Planning Guide currently under development and scheduled for release in Fall 2016.

Report out from SCC Work Group

The Forest Service's Washington Office SCC Team will follow up with Regions in the next few weeks to ask additional questions. In the short term, the team will clarify and give direction on any misinterpretations of the directives. In the long term, the team will work with the SCC work group to determine what type of guidance (white papers, webinars, learning calls) is appropriate. The SCC work group will have the opportunity to provide input on this guidance. The work group co-chairs will draft a memo highlighting the key takeaways from the two reports.

Citizen Guide/Government Guide Update

Final draft texts of both guides are currently posted on the FACA website. The final draft text is in the USDA clearance process and has been given to the graphic designer to complete the layout. Once complete, the illustrated version with final text will go through the Forest Service and USDA Offices of Communication for a last review. The final illustrated guides will then be posted to the FACA website and hard copies will be printed for distribution. The agency estimates that the process will take 6-8 weeks.

USFS present draft Public Involvement Guide and request input from FACA

The agency shared the preliminary draft of the Public Involvement Guide with the RPDs and the Committee, requesting review and input by April 8. The Outreach work group and other interested Committee members will review the draft. Using an iterative process, the agency will incorporate the feedback received and release a second draft of the guide for review.

Review and discuss v7 draft 'Evaluation Checklist'

The Committee agreed to the draft 'Evaluation Checklist' with the following changes: the title will be changed to 'Programmatic Overview of Implementation of the Rule – Measuring Success' and questions pertaining to the wilderness and wild and scenic river processes will be added. The sub group co-chairs will draft a cover letter to accompany the document. The group discussed that the programmatic overview can be used as a congressional communications tool.

Review and discuss draft wilderness recommendations on pre-assessment work

The Committee agreed to the draft wilderness recommendations on pre-assessment work with the following changes: the list of options will be deleted and the phrase '*and with the expectation that the assessment will influence the final inventory*' will be added to the first sentence of the recommendation paragraph. The final recommendation will be conveyed to agency leadership.

Report out/dialogue on the Tongass DEIS

The sub group that reviewed the draft Tongass amendment voiced concern over the scope and construction of the amendment, stating that this may set precedent for future amendments. The sub group agreed to continue to discuss with the agency how to develop a process that maintains the integrity of the rule but still allows 1982 plans to be amended.

Translating Inputs into Memo to the Chief

The intent of the Chief's Memo is to establish communication between the Committee and leadership. The Memo, drafted by the co-chairs, will highlight key findings from the SCC reports, wilderness recommendations and Programmatic Overview of Implementation of the Rule. The Committee is interested in continuing to

explore the ideas of ‘form following function’ (the need to turn planning on its head and allow the principles and aspirations of the rule to inform implementation), co-leadership and shared decision-making.

Next Meeting

The next Committee meeting will be held in Charleston, SC on May 9-12. An option field trip to the Francis Marion NF will be held on May 9. Possible topics for the field trip include: fire management, adaptive management and desired conditions. Potential meeting topics include: outreach to underserved communities, the monitoring transition and amendments.