

Forest Service Planning Rule
Tribal Workshops
Southwestern Region 3

Summary of Discussion

Facilitated and summarized by:

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US Forest Service, Southwestern Region 3 Tribal Workshops on the Forest Planning Rule

To afford tribal governments in this region an opportunity to learn about and comment on the Forest Planning Rule revision process, Regional Forester Corbin Newman invited the 55 tribes in the region to an informal conversation. This was not intended to be formal government-to-government consultation, but rather an additional forum where tribes and the Forest Service could exchange information and ideas, and where communication and collaboration could be realized. The points raised during these four workshops are summarized in the following document.

Southwestern Region 3 -- Tribal Workshops:

- April 27, 2010 Pojoaque, New Mexico
- April 28, 2010 Albuquerque, New Mexico
- April 28, 2010 Phoenix, Arizona
- April 29, 2010 Flagstaff, Arizona

This report covers the roundtable in Flagstaff, AZ.

**FOREST PLAN RULE, SOUTHWESTERN REGION 3
TRIBAL WORKSHOP
Hopi Convention Center, Flagstaff, AZ
April 29, 2010**

Facilitator: Dexter Albert

Recorders: Yewah Lau & Jason Hurd

Tribal participants:

Clayton Hunyumtewa, Director of Hopi Land Administration

Carl Seweyestewa, Hopi Tribal Forester

Ed Singer, President of the Cameron Chapter, Navajo Nation

Robyn Interpreter, Attorney, Yavapai Apache Nation

Judy Piner, Cultural Preservation Department, Yavapai Apache Nation

Elizabeth Rocha, Elder, Cultural Representative, Yavapai Apache Nation

Vincent Randall, Elder, Cultural Representative, NAGPRA Coordinator, Yavapai Apache Nation

Mae Franklin, Kaibab NF and Grand Canyon NP Navajo Liaison

Forest Service staff:

Gilbert Zepeda, Deputy Regional Forester, Southwestern Region

Dan Meza, Office of Tribal Relations Liaison

Craig Johnson, Tribal Liaison, Coconino NF

Earl Stewart, Forest Supervisor, Coconino NF

Christine Dawe, FS Region 3, AZ State Liaison

Yewah Lau, Planner, Coconino National Forest

Discussion:

Consultation: Participants were concerned that consultation with tribes is not meaningful, that by the time tribes are contacted “it is already a done deal.” They asked to sit down with the Forest Service at the beginning of the process, when an idea first arises, not after the fact. In one case, tribal elders went out to talk about cultural sites on a certain forest, and the road was already being built. This kind of experience erodes confidence and trust in the Forest Service’s consultation process. The Apache Sitgreaves Forest seems to be moving ahead without tribal consultation.

Sending a letter and waiting for a reply does not constitute consultation, said the tribes. Lack of response to the letter does not mean the tribe has no concerns. In the Snowbowl hearings, lawyers testified that they had consulted with tribes and showed copies of letters they had sent to tribes. That was very offensive to the tribes involved. Consultation is face-to-face. They need to sit down, tribal leaders and Forest Service staff, especially when cultural resource issues are at stake. Some supported conference calls, not as a substitute for face-to-face communication, but as way for ongoing communication that is easier and less expensive for tribes working on national issues.

Tribes cited two examples of meaningful consultation. The AZ Department of Transportation has worked well with tribes on some projects. Also, the Tonto NF prepared an ethnographic study to assess the traditional conditions of the Payson District. This was a good demonstration of listening to tribal concerns.

Whole Lands approach – need for coordination and communication: There were concerns that forests and tribes aren't communicating important fire information to each other, nor do neighboring forests seem to communicate with each other. The Yellowjacket Fire is one example where there were important issues that were not coordinated. The Yavapai Apache Nation is surrounded by two national forests, the Coconino and the Prescott, yet those forests do not seem to coordinate with each other about issues pertaining to the tribe.

With respect to smoke management in the Coconino and Grand Canyon area, the federal agencies are being more responsive to Navajo concerns.

Climate change: From the tribal point of view, federal agencies seem to be “doing their own thing” with respect to climate change, each using different statistics. Tribes have no capacity to deal with climate change issues. There is no funding for tribes for learning about and adapting to climate change. For the smaller tribes, each branch of the government is trying to piece-meal a strategy. There is evidence of climate change in invasive noxious weed increase, larger sand storms, changing weather and season cycles.

Cultural issues: Tribes urged the Forest Service to include cultural issues and connection to land as an additional substantive principle in the new Forest Planning Rule. How native people connect to a place – their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge of the land, sacred sites, etc. – is just as important as environmental sustainability. “We were here first and we should be able to continue to practice what we have always practiced.”

Cultural knowledge: Participants asked the Forest Service to value tribal knowledge and data. Tribal people have been on the land for many, many generations; federal agency staff have only come recently to the area and have a short history with the land. This rich local scientific data is oral, not written. Because of this, when tribes come to the table to give testimony on science, they often “get slapped in the face.” When final decisions are made, the tribal input is not considered scientific. The testimony from a forum called “The Elders Spoke” was recorded and documented, but still it was not considered scientific. Participants suggested that accepting both the western science and the oral tradition could give a better result. Some tribes have cultural resource advisory teams that can review forest plans and offer consultation.

For a more efficient planning process: Participants suggested earlier consultation would expedite the process. Talking to tribes regularly and letting them know what projects are in the works for upcoming years will help the planning go more smoothly.

Set deadlines and be committed to them. This Forest Planning Rule revision and the tribal workshops is a step in the right direction.

Educate Forest Service staff: Tribes are concerned with the high turnover rate of FS staff. A tribe may work with a new employee and develop a good relationship, and then they are gone. Often the staff at the lower levels are more responsive to tribal needs; “farther up the line is where the trouble is.” New employees and middle and upper management need to understand tribal sovereignty, federal responsibilities, and the importance of respecting and working with tribal governments. The Southwest Strategy, where federal agencies came together to learn about common issues and coordinate their actions, was useful in this way.

Going out in the field is critical. Staff can understand better how tribes feel about their resources at a deeper level. Walking the land with the elders is an excellent way to assess what was there historically. Much of this knowledge is unfortunately not being passed on to the younger generation.

Value of Tribal Participation: A tribal leader emphasized that “we’re not just a self-interest group.” All tribes, he said, want the best for everyone and believe in multiple use. They understand that the forests were created for all of us. “We’re trying to tell you how to manage this for the betterment of all of us. You say it’s always those damn Indians trying to stop something, but we’re not. We’re trying to help you to enjoy and respect the forests as much as we do.”

Forests for good health: A participant observed that the forest offers a great resource for good health. Hiking, camping, and other recreational activities can help address health issues for tribes, and others, like diabetes and obesity.

Economic impacts: The rule should consider the significant place of tribes in a vibrant rural economy. Often their economic contributions and needs are taken into consideration. There are campground issues between Yavapai Apache and Camp Verde.

A participant recounted an experience as an artist in residence for two weeks in the San Juan NF. The experience was valuable, but the noise from OHVs and other motorized vehicles was constant.

Frustration: A participant expressed frustration that tribes repeat these messages over and over, and the federal agencies don’t seem to listen. “You keep on asking the same questions every time and we give you the same answers. I can’t understand why you don’t hear us.”

[summary prepared by Lucy Moore. Please contact her with comments or questions
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