



CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

DOCUMENT STRUCTURE

The Forest Service has prepared this draft programmatic environmental impact statement in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant Federal and State laws and regulations. This draft programmatic environmental impact statement discloses the predicted consequences of implementing the proposed action and alternatives. This draft programmatic environmental impact statement is available online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule>. The final programmatic environmental impact statement, when completed, will be available on the same website.

The document is organized into four chapters:

Chapter 1. Purpose of and Need for Action: This chapter includes information on the history of the proposal, the purpose of and need for action, and the Agency's proposal for achieving the purpose and need. This chapter also details how the Forest Service informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded. Finally this chapter describes the significant issues identified from internal and external scoping.

Chapter 2. Alternatives, including the Proposed Action: This chapter provides a more detailed description of the Agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues identified during scoping.

Chapter 3. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences: This chapter describes the effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives.

Chapter 4. Consultation and Coordination: This chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the programmatic environmental impact statement.

Index: The index provides page numbers by topic.

Appendices: The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the programmatic environmental impact statement.

Additional documentation, including more detailed analyses, is in the project planning record.

OVERVIEW OF THE NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM

The Forest Service is responsible for managing the lands and resources of the National Forest System (NFS), which includes approximately 193 million acres in 44 states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. The NFS is composed of 155 national forests, 20 national grasslands, one national tallgrass prairie, and other lands under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Agriculture (the Secretary).

The Forest Service administers the NFS in accordance with the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act (MUSYA) and other laws. Congress has directed that over 44 million acres of the NFS are to be managed as part of special land classifications intended to preserve natural conditions and characteristics. Almost twenty-four percent of the NFS is managed as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System (36.1 million acres), National Monuments (3.6 million acres), National Recreation Areas (2.9 million acres), and Wild and Scenic Rivers (1.2 million acres). More information on the acreage and location of these designations can be found at <http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/2009/lar09index.html>. Additionally, there are currently over 5.4 million acres of NFS lands recommended for wilderness. Areas recommended for wilderness are not available for any use or activity that could reduce the wilderness potential of an area. The Agency has also identified approximately 58.5 million acres of inventoried roadless areas through various reviews, land management planning, and other large-scale assessments.

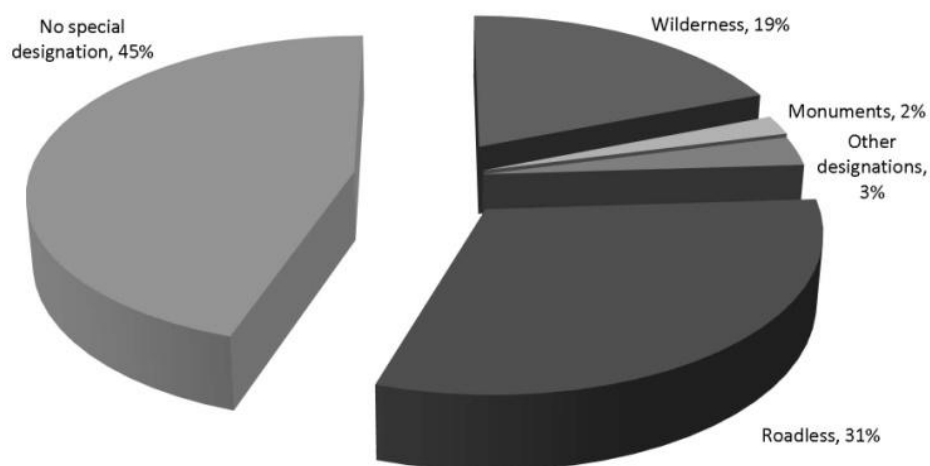


Figure 1. NFS Lands

ROLE OF THE PLANNING RULE AND LAND MANAGEMENT PLANS

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA)(16 U.S.C. at 1601-1614), requires the Secretary to promulgate regulations under the principles of the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960 to set out the process for the development and revision of land and resource management plans as well as guidelines and standards set out in NFMA (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)).

Levels of Planning

The Government Results and Performance Act (5 U.S.C. 306) requires the head of each agency to submit a strategic plan for program activities to the Office of Management and Budget and to the Congress. Strategic plans must be updated every three years.

The Department of Agriculture Strategic Plan FY 2010-2015 (available at <http://www.ocfo.usda.gov/usdasp/sp2010/sp2010.pdf>) is the topmost level of Agency planning. The USDA strategic plan contains four strategic goals that explain the Department's priorities:

- Assist rural communities to create prosperity so they are self-sustaining, re-populating, and economically thriving (Goal 1);
- Ensure our national forests and private working lands are conserved, restored, and made more resilient to climate change, while enhancing our water resources (Goal 2);
- Help America promote agricultural production and biotechnology exports as America works to increase food security (Goal 3); and
- Ensure that all of America's children have access to safe, nutritious, and balanced meals (Goal 4).

These goals contain 14 objectives that describe the Department's major programmatic policies and cover the myriad programs and services that USDA administers. The first two goals are the most relevant to the NFS.

The USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan FY 2007-2012, available at <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/strategic/fs-sp-fy07-12.pdf> supplements the USDA strategic plan with Agency-specific strategic direction to guide the Forest Service in delivering its mission. The Forest Service strategic plan contains the following goals:

- Restore, sustain, and enhance the nation's forests and grasslands,
- Provide and sustain benefits to the American people,
- Conserve open space,
- Sustain and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities,
- Maintain basic management capabilities of the Forest Service,
- Engage urban America with Forest Service programs, and

- Provide science-based applications and tools for sustainable natural resources management.

The goals and objectives of these strategic plans influence the direction that Forest Service programs and NFS unit planning will take over the next several years.

The next level of planning is land management planning, which occur at the unit level. Land management plans provide broad guidance to the Forest Service for project and activity decisionmaking in a national forest, grassland, prairie, or other administrative unit. Plans reflect laws, regulations, and Agency policies. A plan does not authorize projects or activities, nor does it commit the Forest Service to take action; however, a plan can constrain the Agency from authorizing or carrying out actions.

The final level of Agency planning comes when a site-specific action is proposed, analyzed and authorized. Site-specific actions must be consistent with law, regulation, and policy and must be consistent with the applicable land management plan.

PLANNING RULE HISTORY

The first planning rule was adopted in 1979, and revised September 30, 1982 (47 FR 43026). The 1982 rule was in turn amended, in part, on June 24, 1983, (48 FR 29122), and on September 7, 1983 (48 FR 40383). The 1982 rule procedures have guided the development, amendment, and revision of the land management plans on all national forests and grasslands¹.

In 1989, the Forest Service, with the assistance of the Conservation Foundation, conducted a comprehensive review of the planning process and published the results in a summary report, “Synthesis of the Critique of Land Management Planning” (http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5127602.pdf). The Critique found that the planning process of the 1982 rule was very complex, had significant costs, took too long, and was too cumbersome.

Subsequently, the Forest Service published an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on February 15, 1991 regarding possible revisions to the 1982 Rule (56 FR 6508). A proposed rule was published in 1995 (60 FR 18886); however, the Secretary elected not to proceed with that proposal.

In late 1997, in response to comments on the 1995 proposed rule, the Secretary convened a 13-member Committee of Scientists to evaluate the Forest Service's planning process and recommend changes. In 1998, the Committee of Scientists held meetings across the country and invited public participation in the discussions. The Committee's findings were issued in a final report, “Sustaining the People's Lands” (Committee of Scientists 1999). The report stated that the Agency could improve planning by relying on the concepts and principles of social, economic, and ecological sustainability; by applying

¹ After the 1982 rule was revised in 2000, plan revisions have consistently used the 1982 rule procedures for development, revision, and amendment of land management plans as optionally allowed in the transition provisions of the 2000 planning rule.

the best available scientific knowledge; and by effectively collaborating with a broad array of citizens, other public servants, and governmental and private entities. In response to many of the findings in the 1990 Synthesis of the Critique of Land Management Planning and the 1999 Committee of Scientists report, the Forest Service published a new rule on November 9, 2000 (65 FR 67514).

The intended purpose of the 2000 rule was to simplify, clarify, and otherwise improve the planning process; to reduce burdensome and costly procedural requirements; to increase the role of science in planning; and to strengthen collaborative relationships with the public and other government entities.

After adoption of the 2000 rule, the Secretary received a number of comments from individuals, groups, and organizations expressing concerns whether implementation of the 2000 rule was feasible. In addition, lawsuits challenging promulgation of the rule were brought by a coalition of 12 environmental groups from seven states and by a coalition of industry groups (*Citizens for Better Forestry v. USDA*, No. C-01-0728-BZ- (N.D. Cal., filed February 16, 2001)) and (*American Forest and Paper Ass'n v. Veneman*, No. 01-CV-00871 (TPJ) (D.D.C., filed April 23, 2001))². As a result of these lawsuits and concerns raised in comments to the Secretary, the Department of Agriculture initiated a review of the 2000 rule, focusing on the concerns raised about feasibility of implementation. The NFMA Planning Rule Review, completed in April 2001, concluded that many of the concerns were serious and required immediate attention (USDA Forest Service 2001). More details of this review are discussed in Chapter 2 under Alternative F.

In addition, the Forest Service developed a business analysis model of the 2000 rule and then conducted a workshop with field-level planners to determine how to implement the 2000 rule based on the business model. The business model provided the basis for a systematic evaluation of the rule. The business model review determined that implementation of the 2000 rule would require significantly more time and budget than the Agency had previously committed to updating and maintaining unit plans (USDA Forest Service 2002a). More details of the business model review are discussed in Chapter 2 under Alternative F.

Having considered the reports of the review teams, the Acting Deputy Undersecretary for Natural Resources and Environment requested that the Chief of the Forest Service propose a new rule. A new planning rule was proposed on December 6, 2002 (67 FR 72770).

The final 2005 rule was published January 5, 2005 (70 FR 1023), and amended March 3, 2006 (71 FR 10837). The intent of the final rule was to streamline and improve the planning process by making plans more adaptable to changes in social, economic, and environmental conditions; to strengthen the role of science in planning; to strengthen collaborative relationships with the public and other governmental entities; and to reaffirm the principle of sustainable management consistent with the Multiple-Use

² These lawsuits were dismissed on March 7, 2005 after the Department published a new planning rule on January 5, 2005 (70 FR 1023).

Sustained-Yield Act and other authorities. The Department relied upon a categorical exclusion for its NEPA compliance for the rule making and did not engage in an Endangered Species Act (ESA) consultation on the rule. This rule was also challenged in court, and on March 30, 2007 the federal district court ruled that the Department had violated NEPA, ESA, and the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) in the promulgation of the rule. The court enjoined the rule's implementation and use until the Department complied with the court's opinion (*Citizens for Better Forestry v. USDA*, 481 F. Supp.2d 1059 (N.D. Cal. 2007)). With respect to the NEPA and ESA rulings, the court ruled that "because the 2005 Rule may significantly affect the quality of the human environment under NEPA, and because it may affect listed species and their habitat under ESA, the Agency must conduct further analysis and evaluation of the impact of the 2005 Rule in accordance with those statutes."

To respond to the district court's injunction of the 2005 rule, the Forest Service issued a new proposal, which was essentially the same as the 2005 rule. The Forest Service prepared an environmental impact statement to accompany the rulemaking, and engaged in discussions with the ESA regulatory agencies. The Department issued a final rule, which was published in the Federal Register on April 21, 2008 (73 FR 21468). Citizens for Better Forestry and others promptly challenged the 2008 rule in court.

On June 30, 2009, the United States District Court for the Northern District of California invalidated the 2008 rule, holding that it was developed in violation of NEPA and ESA. The court held that the EIS did not adequately disclose the effects of the rule and that ESA consultation had not been done. The district court vacated the 2008 rule, enjoined the USDA from further implementing it and remanded it to the USDA for further proceedings (*Citizens for Better Forestry v. USDA*, 632 F. Supp. 2d 968 (N.D. Cal. 2009)).

At present, the planning rule is the rule issued in 2000. When it held the 2008 rule invalid, the district court ordered that the Department could reinstate the 2000 rule or the 1982 rule. The automatic effect of invalidating the 2008 rule was the reinstatement of the 2000 rule; to resurrect the 1982 rule would have required notice and comment rulemaking. Since the Department had quickly decided after the court's order to develop an entirely new rule, there seemed no point to engage in notice and comment rulemaking to issue the 1982 rule anew. In order to reinstate the 2000 Rule in the Code of Federal Regulations, and to update the transition provisions, the Department published the 2000 rule in the Federal Register, on December 18, 2009 (74 FR 67059).

The 2000 rule includes provisions providing for an orderly transition from the 1982 planning rule. The transition provisions, as updated in the 2009 reissuance of the rule, allows for planning to continue using the provisions of the prior, 1982 rule (36 CFR 219.35). Because the issues regarding the feasibility of implementing the 2000 rule provisions remain, the Forest Service has been relying upon the 2000 rule's transition provision to develop, revise, and amend land management plans until a new planning rule is in place.

PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR ACTION

The NFMA requires regulations under the principles of the Multiple-Use, Sustained-Yield Act of 1960, that set out the process for the development and revision of the land management plans and the guidelines and standards the Act prescribes (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)).

As discussed in the Planning Rule History section of this chapter, the Forest Service and the Department believe that neither the current, 2000 Rule, nor the prior, 1982 Rule are the appropriate rule for these times. The Department and the Forest Service have determined that the 2000 rule beyond the Agency's capability to implement (see discussion under Alternative F). The 1982 rule provisions, which have been used to develop, revise, and amend all current land management plans, make for an unduly complex, costly, lengthy, and cumbersome planning process. Moreover, the 1982 rule provisions are not current with regard to science, knowledge of our environment, or social values. (See "Synthesis of the Critique of Land Management Planning" available at http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5127602.pdf).

Furthermore, the Secretary has determined that there is a need for a planning rule that protects, reconnects, and restores national forests and grasslands for the benefit of human communities and natural resources. A new planning rule is needed to ensure that all plans will be responsive to issues such as the challenges of climate change; the need for forest restoration and conservation, watershed protection, and wildlife conservation; and the sustainable use of public lands to support vibrant communities. It must be clear, efficient, and effective, while meeting NFMA, MUSYA, and other legal requirements. It also must ensure a transparent, collaborative process that allows for effective public participation. The rule should also be within the Agency's capability to implement on all NFS units.

The NFS has 127 land management plans, 68 of which are past due for revision. Most plans were developed between 1983 and 1993 and should have been revised between 1998 and 2008. With stability in planning regulations, national land management planning can regain momentum and units will be able to complete timely revisions.

PROPOSED ACTION

The Agency is proposing adoption of a planning rule to guide development, revision, and amendment of land management plans for the National Forest System. The proposed planning rule is a product of the most collaborative planning rule development in the Agency's history involving many agencies, organizations, Tribes, and individuals who care deeply about their national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service considered input gathered through broad-based collaboration to craft a proposed rule intended to be stakeholder-driven, firmly rooted in science, and implementable. The proposed rule is described in Chapter 2 under Alternative A. The complete text of the proposed rule is in Appendix A.

DECISION FRAMEWORK

The Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment, USDA, will decide whether or not to promulgate the planning rule, as proposed, or some alternative thereto that meets the stated purpose and need.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

A Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare a new planning rule and an accompanying environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register on December 18, 2009 (74 FR 67165). The NOI solicited public comments on the proposal until February 16, 2010. The notice presented a series of substantive and procedural principles to guide development of a new planning rule. Under each principle, the notice posed several questions to stimulate thoughts and encourage responses. The Forest Service received over 26,000 comments in response to the notice.

The Agency held a science forum on March 29 and 30, 2010 in Washington, DC to ground development of a new planning rule in science and to foster a collaborative dialogue among the scientific community. Booz Allen Hamilton, an independent technology and consulting firm, was retained to design, organize, and facilitate the forum in order to maintain objectivity and transparency in the proceedings. Panels made up of 21 scientists drawn from academia, research organizations, non-government organizations, industry, and the federal government presented the latest science on topics relevant to the development of a new rule for developing land management plans. The format was designed to allow scientists and practitioners to share the current state of knowledge in key areas and to encourage open dialog with interested stakeholders. Over 130 people attended the forum in person while approximately 300 others attended by webcast.

The Forest Service also convened a series of four national roundtables, with the support of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution (<http://www.ecr.gov/>) and the Meridian Institute (<http://www.merid.org/>). The national roundtables were held in Washington, DC during the course of developing the proposed planning rule. The intent was to have a national level dialogue around the concepts for development of the Forest Service proposed planning rule.

The first roundtable, held on April 1 and 2, 2010, focused on the substantive topics identified in the NOI, including restoration, watershed health, plant and animal diversity, use and enjoyment of federal lands, contributions to vibrant economies, and climate change. Approximately 120 people attended the roundtable in person while over 300 others attended by webcast.

The second roundtable, held on April 20 and 21, 2010, focused on the process topics identified in the NOI, including social, economic and cultural contributions of Forest Service lands to vibrant economies, providing for effective collaboration, the relationship between NFS lands and surrounding lands, plan revisions and NEPA, and adaptive management. Approximately 75 people attended the second roundtable in person while 60 others attended by webcast.

The third roundtable, held on May 11 and 12, 2010, used the results of the science forum and preceding national and regional roundtables to address six topics identified as needing additional input to clarify the concepts for the proposed rule. The six topics consisted of: providing for plant and animal diversity; restoration/resilience; the contribution of recreation and other goods and services from the National Forest System to vibrant economies; the role of science; managing National Forest System lands in the face of changing conditions; and monitoring. The third roundtable was attended in person by 111 people while 50 others attended by webcast.

The fourth roundtable was held on July 29 and 30, 2010 in Washington, DC. The intent of this roundtable was to share draft concepts for the proposed planning rule to determine if any clarification was needed and to obtain feedback. The concepts shared were: collaboration and public involvement, monitoring, recreation and other multiple uses, plant and animal diversity, and restoration and resilience. An estimated 146 people attended the fourth roundtable, 79 others attended via webcast, and 20 people participated in a virtual breakout session via phone and computer links.

The Forest Service held an additional 33 regional roundtables during April and May in the following locations: Missoula, MT; Coeur D'Alene, ID; Billings, MT; Lakewood, CO; Cheyenne, WY; Rapid City, SD; Laramie, WY; Sheridan, WY; Cody, WY; Phoenix AZ; Albuquerque NM; Salt Lake City, UT; Vernal, UT; Boise, ID; Jackson, WY; Idaho Falls, ID; Richfield, UT; Sparks, NV; Las Vegas, NV; Elko, NV; Price, UT; Cedar City, UT; McCall, ID; Salmon, ID; Twin Falls, ID; Sacramento, CA; Bishop, CA; Redding, CA; San Bernardino, CA; Portland, OR; Atlanta, GA; Chicago, IL; and Juneau, AK.

Over 1,500 people attended the regional roundtables in person while others joined the Portland, Atlanta, Chicago, and Juneau roundtables by webcast.

With the California roundtable meetings being held on a Tuesday, many county supervisors were unable to participate due to the fact that many boards of supervisors hold their meetings on Tuesday. Therefore, in order to provide an additional opportunity for interested county elected officials and staff to hear the Forest Service's presentation and to provide input, Forest Service staff, working with both the Regional Council of Rural Counties (RCRC) and the California State Association of Counties (CSAC) attended the RCRC's board meeting on April 21, 2010 and hosted a conference call/webinar on April 22, 2010.

To ensure Tribal voices were heard, collaborative efforts also included two national tribal roundtables conducted via conference call on May 3rd and August 5th so all interested tribal members would have the opportunity to participate. Six Tribal roundtables were also held in the following locations: Bayside and Clovis, California; Phoenix and Flagstaff, Arizona; and Albuquerque, and Pojoaque, New Mexico. The Tribal roundtables were held in addition to formal government-to-government consultations with Tribes.

On September 23, 2010, the Deputy Chief for the National Forest System sent a letter inviting 564 federally recognized Tribes and 29 Alaska Native Corporations to begin formal consultation on the proposed planning rule. While the initial, formal consultation period of 180 days will overlap with the public comment period for the proposed rule and

draft programmatic environmental impact statement, the Forest Service will continue to conduct government-to-government consultation on the planning rule throughout the process as tribal consultation is an ongoing, iterative process. The Agency held meetings across the country with designated tribal officials in November and December 2010.

On December 17, 2009, the Forest Service began maintaining a planning rule weblog to provide an additional opportunity for dialogue with the community interested in the new planning rule. During June and July 2010, the Forest Service posted various draft rule provisions on the weblog for comment. Weblog posts included draft rule concepts addressing collaboration, monitoring, recreation and other multiple uses, people and the environment, recreation, resilience, draft planning rule framework, all lands, climate change, and watersheds.

Summaries of the national, regional, and tribal roundtable meetings, along with a summary of comments on the NOI and the planning rule blog may be viewed at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule>.

ISSUES

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) regulations at 40 CFR 1501.7 direct agencies to “Determine the scope (§ 1508.25) and the significant issues to be analyzed in depth in the environmental impact statement” and to “identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (§ 1506.3).” Scope consists of the range of actions, alternatives, and impacts to be considered in an environmental impact statement (40 CFR 1508.24). The scope of this programmatic environmental impact statement is defined by the proposed action, alternatives developed to address significant issues while meeting the purpose and need for action, and the potential impacts identified in the significant issues.

The Forest Service identified significant issues from diverging viewpoints and disagreements articulated in comments responding to the December 18, 2009 NOI and the roundtable meetings held throughout the country. Issues significant to the proposed action are those that are:

1. within the scope of the proposed action;
2. not already decided by law or other regulation;
3. related to the decision to be made; or
4. supported by scientific or factual evidence.

Many of the issues that have been raised are local in nature, in that solutions would be more appropriately crafted in specific land management plans or even particular project designs. While these issues are outside the scope of a planning rule, they are very important and reinforce the need for a planning rule that maintains the flexibility to address such local issues.

The Forest Service identified the following significant issues during scoping. These issues, along with the various aspects of the purpose and need, define the scope of the

effects analysis that follows in Chapter 3. The issues represent alternative viewpoints concerning the nature, role, or content of a planning rule and associated consequences.

Ecosystem Restoration

Some stakeholders have expressed the view that restoration should not be mentioned explicitly in the rule. Support for this perspective includes the points that the NFMA is silent on the concept of restoration; restoration is just one tool of many available to managers; and the concept of restoration will be implicitly addressed as part of habitat management. Many have said that restoration should be viewed as a process towards a goal of ecosystem resilience and that an understanding of ecosystem function in the area over time can help inform the restoration process.

On the other hand, others have expressed a desire for the rule to be explicit about restoration because the topic is simply too important to leave out. They note that the Forest Service Chief has already indicated that restoration will be a high priority in Forest Service planning. Some suggest that the planning rule could identify restoration priorities for places, such as sites damaged by extraction activities, lands crucial to habitat connectivity, lands overtaken by noxious weeds or invasive species, and economic resources such as water for industry and watersheds. Others suggest that sites that are most removed from baseline values should be prioritized.

Essentially everyone agrees that the term “restoration” must be clearly defined and explained if it is used in the rule. For example, there needs to be clarity about how the term applies to either restoring an area to a previously existing ecological state or to a better level of ecological functionality or resilience. A few stakeholders are disturbed by what they perceive as an assumption that all NFS lands are degraded and need fixing. Many like the definition of “restoration” that is currently in a Forest Service Interim Directive (USDA Forest Service 2010h): “The process of assisting the recovery of resilience and adaptive capacity of ecosystems that have been degraded, damaged, or destroyed. Restoration focuses on establishing the composition, structure, pattern, and ecological processes necessary to make terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems sustainable, resilient, and healthy under current and future conditions.”

Many of those who take the position that restoration should be explicitly included in the rule agree that the rule should require unit level restoration needs assessments to ensure coherent restoration strategies.

Watershed Protection

Many people concur with the general notion that, because water quality provides a foundational reflection of landscape health, a key element of the rule should be protection and enhancement of water resources. There is less agreement about what exactly the rule should require, although there seems to be support for some kind of accountability for NFS units to protect and enhance water resources balanced with the need for flexibility.

There is general agreement that the rule should require analysis of water resources. Some suggest that the scale at which this is done should be up to the individual plans. Others take the position that the rule should speak to the role of National Forests and Grasslands

in affecting water quality and quantity both within NFS lands and within the broader landscape.

There is difference of opinion on whether to specifically include standards for watershed health in the rule. Some people suggest that the planning rule should require plans to determine standards or provisions for watershed health rather than including those standards in the rule itself. These people support this position with the assertion that such standards must be unit specific or they would not address local resources and conditions and would result in overly burdensome analytical requirements or project constraints that would keep units from implementing the projects needed to achieve overall unit management goals. Others have expressed a belief that the rule should have standards to protect and enhance watershed health and water resources. There is concern that without measurable and enforceable standards for watershed restoration and maintenance in the rule, responsible officials might not be held accountable for watershed protection.

Diversity of Plant and Animal Communities

People have differing opinions about the most appropriate way for the rule to provide guidance for maintaining plant and animal diversity and whether to contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species and maintain native species within the plan area. Some people believe the planning rule should include viability requirements that are focused on individual wildlife, fish, and plant species and populations like the 1982 rule's requirement to manage habitat to maintain viable populations of native and desired nonnative vertebrates. These people are concerned that without a requirement for population level provisions, plans would not contain the direction needed to maintain plant and animal diversity on the unit.

Others suggest the planning rule should take an ecological conditions or habitat-based approach to maintaining species diversity by focusing on maintenance or restoration of the structure, composition, processes, connectivity, and diversity of healthy and resilient terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems in the plan area. They state that the Forest Service, through its management actions, has a greater ability to influence the amount and quality of habitats than wildlife species, and that focusing on that aspect of ecological sustainability could provide the best opportunity for maintaining populations of all species in the plan area. They add that this approach should be validated through monitoring of key ecosystem characteristics and selected species to assess the ability of particular ecological conditions to support plant and animal populations.

Climate Change

Two general perspectives have been expressed about whether climate change should be addressed in the rule. The first perspective is that climate change does not need to be mentioned in the rule. The second is that climate change is such a fundamental ecosystem stressor that the rule must explicitly address it.

Subscribers to the first viewpoint have said there is too much uncertainty about the causes and effects of climate change (particularly at the unit level) to address in a planning rule. Others suggest that the rule could include adequate provisions for dealing with changing conditions in general without needing to mention climate change specifically. They add

that climate change is but one change to be anticipated along with local disturbances, changes in social values, technological advances, and shifts in local, regional, and national economies.

Those of the second opinion suggest that the rule should require a thorough consideration of climate change in the planning process including an acknowledgement of the local climate conditions and uncertainties. Some want the planning rule to establish requirements for the evaluation of climate change such as setting the scale at which to evaluate climate change impacts, use of scenario planning, and incorporation of Native American knowledge and interests into the evaluation of climate change. Others want the rule to include, not only process requirements for planning, but also requirements for certain kinds of explicit content in the plans themselves, such as identification of risks pertinent to climate change and specific protection of refugia and adaptation corridors.

Multiple Uses

Generally, people have said that the best way for the Forest Service to contribute to social and economic sustainability is to maintain a focus in the rule on ensuring healthy forest ecosystems. Many note that the Forest Service does not really have much ability to influence economies, and should focus instead on the land management business it knows best. Others suggest that the Forest Service should elevate the importance of vibrant local communities through effective involvement of and collaboration with representatives of the local communities that are impacted by Forest Service land management plans. Many people suggest that national guidance should establish a consistent framework for NFS units to evaluate socio-economic impacts. However, they say this framework should be flexible enough for communities and NFS units to team together and adapt it to their area and needs.

People recognize that the relationship between individual communities and NFS units is extremely variable. For example, many counties, particularly in the West, are heavily influenced by, and rely upon, forest management because a large percentage of the land base is under Forest Service or other public jurisdictions. People point out that a substantial amount of jobs and income in such counties depend on the multiple uses of NFS lands, particularly from outdoor recreation, timber harvest, and livestock grazing. Many other communities are only minimally impacted by their local forest or grassland. They say the rule needs to be cognizant of this variability.

There is broad agreement that recreation is a sustainable use of NFS lands that contributes significantly to local economies. People generally agree the rule should reflect recreation as a core value, although views vary about how this core value should be reconciled with other core values and legal requirements. That is, some suggest recreation should be highlighted in the rule to convey that recreation is an important multiple-use resource so that resulting land management plans would adequately address the recreation resource, while others argue for addressing recreation as one of the many multiple uses of NFS lands. Others observe that recreation should be given the same level of recognition as other multiple uses. In general, people say that the planning rule should set broad objectives for recreation and should identify analytical assessment and

evaluation tools to inform decision makers at the local level in making specific land use decisions.

Some people have pointed out the importance of grazing to their communities and that grazing can be managed sustainably. There were differences of opinion concerning the sustainability of grazing with regard to its effects on watersheds and riparian areas.

Other people have expressed the view that timber harvest supports economic sustainability through the production of timber, pulp for paper, specialty woods for furniture, and fuel for small-scale renewable energy projects. Timber harvesting, whether for restoration or wood production objectives, provides employment and tax revenue in many counties throughout the country.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

Some people warn that striving for efficient planning might result in going too fast. They say it is more important to conduct a planning process collectively and collaboratively than to develop plans quickly. They added that history tells us that trying to go too fast can result in failure.

Some people argue for a simple planning process because planning has taken too much funding away from important resource management projects and has taken too much of people's time. They say that it is difficult to remain engaged in a process that extends over several years. Consequently, participants – both within the Agency and the public – come and go, which changes the process dynamics and results in redundant planning processes that take even more agency resources.

Others agree with keeping the rule simple, but advocate for prescriptive rule provisions to address a particular resource or use of NFS lands. These people are concerned that without prescriptive rule provisions, responsible officials would not be held accountable for creating and implementing land management plans that adequately protect the resources of the planning area.

Throughout discussions on the other issues, there has been a difference between those who desire a prescriptive planning rule and those who want flexibility to address local concerns. Some people are of the opinion that to be effective, a rule should be fairly prescriptive to ensure consistency and accountability across NFS units, adding that the current land management planning process is too flexible. Others are of the opposite opinion, that a rule should be flexible to ensure plans are able to focus on local resource issues, and suggest that the current planning process (under the 1982 rule procedures) is too prescriptive and complicated, leading to delays and frustration. In spite of this divergence of opinion, a few ideas have emerged that might help bridge these gaps, including: (1) applying differing amounts of flexibility for different resources, but within a clearly defined national-level framework and (2) requiring plans to be developed cooperatively with both community and scientific involvement – thereby building the buy-in and accountability that are pre-requisites for many stakeholders to trust the Forest Service with flexibility.

Transparency and Collaboration

Comments in all of the issues areas identified in this statement indicate recognition that many stakeholders are involved in these issues and all should have the opportunity to be engaged in the collaboration process. Many people stress the need to involve people of diverse cultures and to reach out to underserved communities.

People often highlight the difference between collaboration and input. Many express frustration with traditional input mechanisms, where input was gathered but not necessarily used – a feeling exacerbated by a less-than-transparent process. They have expressed the desire for collaboration and transparency as to how their input is being used. Some people suggest that the rule incorporate the concept of adaptive governance – which would entail stakeholders collaboratively identifying needs, problems, and opportunities; collaboratively creating solutions to those needs and problems; collaboratively implementing those solutions; and collaboratively monitoring those solutions in a continuous manner to feed back into the system.

Some people suggest the planning rule should establish a structured public involvement and collaboration process for plan development, revision, and amendment. Otherwise, responsible officials might only meet minimum requirements for public involvement, such as formal notice and opportunity to review and comment. In which case, public concerns might not be fully incorporated into the planning process and a plan might not adequately reflect major areas of public interest.

Coordination and Cooperation Beyond NFS Boundaries

There is considerable, but not universal, interest in and/or enthusiasm for the concept of an “all lands” approach, depending on how it is defined and implemented. Many note that the concept of an all lands approach is connected to land management planning in terms of the need for effective communication and collaboration between the Forest Service and its neighbors and local governments. They suggest that the Forest Service should consider the types of interactions it wants beyond its boundaries and build an overall framework to promote those interactions. Many suggest that the Forest Service should promote a spirit of collaboration throughout the Agency. This spirit could be advanced in the planning rule, but further training and agency support will be required to make it a reality.

People note that boundaries are permeable and that an “all lands” approach could be useful for achieving many different management objectives, including protecting at-risk species, creating resilient ecosystems, protecting watersheds, preservation of historic resources, supporting trails that cross jurisdictions, and providing recreational access. They also say that an “all lands” approach is already being employed in some contexts. For example, coordination with the States already occurs with respect to management of wildlife habitat and coordination with States and local governments occurs with respect to responding to wildfire.

