

How is the Final Planning Rule Different from the 1982 Rule Procedures?

The Forest Service has been attempting to modernize the planning rule since the early 1990s. Planning rule procedures from 1982 have guided the development, amendment, and revision of all existing Forest Service land management plans. However, since 1982 much has changed in our understanding of how to create and implement effective land management plans, and in our understanding of science and the land management challenges facing Forest Supervisors.

The 2012 final planning rule creates an adaptive framework that will allow the Forest Service to meet modern and future needs, taking into account new understanding of science, land management, and the all-lands context for managing resources. It focuses on outcomes, rather than outputs, and would help units identify their unique roles in the broader landscape and create land management plans to guide proactive contributions to ecological, social, and economic sustainability.

Because planning under the 1982 procedures is often time consuming and cumbersome, it has been a challenge for units to keep plans current. Instead of updating plans as conditions on the ground change, units often wait and make changes all at once during the required revision process every 15 years. Plans in the interim lose much of their utility because they no longer reflect the reality on the ground. Of the 127 land management plans for National Forest System lands, 68 are now more than 15 years old and are past due for revision.

The final planning rule emphasizes collaboration, improves transparency and strengthens the role of public involvement throughout the planning process. It also requires the use of the best available scientific information to inform decisions.

Highlights of the final planning rule as compared to the 1982 procedures include:

- A more effective and efficient framework, creating an adaptive planning process based on science, public values, and effective land management practices. The agency expects plan revisions will take less time and cost less money under the final planning rule, while achieving better results for people and the environment.
- Increased requirements to strengthen the role of public involvement and collaboration throughout all stages of land management planning, while also retaining the traditional notice and comment procedures under NEPA.
- Improved ability to respond to climate change and other stressors through an adaptive framework of assessment, planning and monitoring and new provisions intended to improve resiliency of ecosystems on each unit.
- An all-lands approach to land management planning for NFS lands, recognizing that many management issues, such as fire, water, and wildlife, will require an understanding of what is happening both on and off the National Forest System.

- An emphasis on the need to restore NFS land and waters, including requirements to maintain and restore ecological integrity, and to consider opportunities for landscape-scale restoration and restore fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Increased protections for water resources, watersheds, and riparian areas, including requirements to identify watersheds for priority restoration; maintain and restore aquatic ecosystems, watersheds, water quality and water resources including public water supplies, groundwater, lakes, streams, and wetlands; maintain and restore riparian areas; and provisions for best management practices for water quality.
- Updated, science-based requirements to provide for plant and animal diversity and the persistence of native species by providing for ecosystem integrity and diversity, and by targeting additional provisions for at-risk species. Plan components will be designed to provide the ecological conditions (habitat) to keep common species common, contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species, conserve candidate and proposed species, and maintain species of conservation concern.
- Strong support for vibrant rural communities, including provisions to guide the contributions of a forest or grassland to social and economic sustainability, taking into account the social, cultural, and economic conditions relevant to the area influenced by the plan and the contributions of the unit to jobs and the economy.
- Requirements to provide for multiple uses and integrated resource management on National Forest System lands, considering a full range of uses and values including timber, mining, grazing, energy, outdoor recreation, watershed, wildlife and fish.
- An emphasis on sustainable recreation as an important multiple use and as a contributor to social and economic sustainability, including requirements that plans provide for sustainable recreation. Responsible officials must also consider habitat to support hunting and fishing when providing for multiple uses.
- Requirements to provide for ecosystem services, protect cultural and historic resources, protect wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers, and appropriately manage other designated areas and areas of tribal importance.
- New requirements for a unit and landscape-scale monitoring program based on the latest science, strengthening the role of monitoring so that units can better track changing conditions and measure progress towards meeting objectives in the plan.
- New requirements to use and document the use of the best available scientific information to inform the assessment, plan decisions, and monitoring program.

The final planning rule should reduce the amount of time (3 to 4 vs. 5 to 7 years) and the amount of money (\$3 to 4 vs. \$5 to 7 million dollars) that it takes to revise individual forest and grassland land management plans, as compared to the 1982 procedures. Reducing the time and cost involved in plan revision and instituting a more adaptive framework for planning will allow the Agency to update more plans using the same amount of resources. Over time, the Agency will be able to keep plans more current so they more accurately reflect the new information and changing conditions on the ground.