

BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST

Land and Resource Management Plan

Preface

Table of Contents

UNDERSTANDING THE REVISED PLAN	I
Background	i
Purpose of the Revised Plan.....	i
Relationship of the Revised Plan to Other Documents	ii
Reader’s Guide to the Revised Plan.....	ii
Implementation of the Forest Plan	ii
Forest Plan Amendment and Revision.....	iv
Integration with Forest Service Directives System.....	iv
Understanding the Bighorn National Forest	iv

Understanding the Revised Plan

Background

The term “Forest Plan” used in this document refers to Forest land and resource management Plans in general. The term “1985 Plan” refers to the Bighorn National Forest Plan signed in 1985. The term “Draft Revised Plan” refers to this document.

Forest Plans are prepared in accordance with the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other laws and regulations. The Bighorn National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1985 Plan) was issued in October 1985. NFMA regulations state that a Forest Plan should ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years (39 CFR 219.10).

The Bighorn National Forest has prepared this Draft Revised Plan and accompanying Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). The public has 90 days to comment on the Draft Revised Plan and DEIS. After the comments are evaluated and the necessary changes made, a Final Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and Record of Decision will be issued. The 1985 Plan remains in effect until the Record of Decision is signed.

Purpose of the Revised Plan

A Forest Plan provides guidance for all resource management activities on a national Forest.

- ◆ It establishes Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives (36 CFR 219.11(b))
- ◆ It establishes Forest-wide standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604 applying to future activities and resource integration requirements in 36 CFR 219.13 through 219.27
- ◆ It establishes management area direction (management area prescriptions) applying to future activities in a management area (resource integration and minimum specific management requirements) 36 CFR 219.11(c).
- ◆ It designates land as suited or not suited for timber production (16 USC 1604(k)) and other resource management activities such as rangeland, recreation management (36 CFR 219.14, 219.15, 219.20, and 219.21). In addition, it identifies lands available for oil and gas leasing and the associated leasing stipulations (36 CFR 228.102)
- ◆ It established monitoring and evaluation requirements (36 CFR 219.11(d)).
- ◆ It recommends the establishment of wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and other special designations to Congress, as appropriate.

P R E F A C E

Forest Plans estimate future management activities, but the actual amount of activities accomplished is determined by annual budgets and site-specific project decisions. Because budgets rarely provide enough money to fully implement a Forest Plan, scheduled activities and actions must be adjusted to match available funds and Congressional intent of appropriations acts. While budget changes do not require Forest Plan amendments, the implications of the changes may require the agency to evaluate the need for amendments.

Relationship of the Revised Plan to Other Documents

Alternatives are described and analyzed in the DEIS. The Draft Revised Plan gives the technical direction for implementing Alternative D, the preferred alternative identified in the DEIS.

Reader's Guide to the Revised Plan

This document contains the Preface, the Draft Revised Plan, and Appendices. Accompanying the Draft Revised Plan is the DEIS and a map package.

The Preface provides background information, describes how the Draft Revised Plan would be implemented through project decision-making, and discusses Forest Plan amendment and revision procedures.

The Draft Revised Plan section describes management direction for the Forest. Chapter 1 includes the goals, objectives, and Forestwide standards and guidelines. Chapter 2 contains the management area prescription standards and guidelines. Chapter 3 describes the geographic areas; a location map of each is included. Chapter 4 discusses the monitoring and evaluation process.

The appendices contain detailed information which may be helpful in understanding or implementing the Plan:

- ◆ Appendix A – Related National Goals
- ◆ Appendix B – Key National and Regional Policies
- ◆ Appendix C – Relevant Federal and State Statutes, Regulations, and Executive Orders
- ◆ Appendix D – Implementation
- ◆ Appendix E – Oil and Gas Leasing Stipulations
- ◆ Appendix F - Lands

Implementation of the Forest Plan

A forest plan provides the framework to guide the day-to-day land and resource management operations of a national Forest. The plan's goals, objectives, standards and guidelines are used to guide the identification and selection of potential projects.

Other guidance is summarized in Appendices A, B, and C.

The forest plan is a strategic programmatic document that does not make project level decisions nor does it make any irreversible or irretrievable commitments of resources. Those decisions are made after more detailed, site-specific analysis and further public comment as part of the site-specific NEPA process.

NFMA requires that resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands be consistent with the forest plan. The following are some examples of project decisions that require more detailed environmental analysis:

- ◆ Timber harvesting and related activities, such as slash disposal and road construction.
- ◆ Range allotment management Plans.
- ◆ Fish or wildlife habitat improvement projects.
- ◆ Watershed improvement projects.
- ◆ Creation of a loop trail system.
- ◆ Decisions for winter sports development, outfitter/guide proposals, and other externally generated projects involving use and occupancy of National Forest System lands.

Resource inventories, actions plans, and schedules are not binding decisions and do not require additional environmental analysis at the project level.

Public Involvement and Coordination with Other Government Agencies –

Public involvement entails more than merely soliciting public comment on proposed actions through the scoping process. Throughout the forest plan revision process, we have been committed to an intensive program of public involvement. In addition, ongoing public involvement and governmental coordination will be a central part of implementing the forest plan.

The Forest will continue to develop both new and existing collaborative efforts as well as encourage public review of monitoring and evaluation reports.

To receive more information, or to be placed on the Forest mailing list, please write to the Forest Supervisor. The mailing address is Forest Supervisor, Bighorn National Forest, 2013 Eastside Second St., Sheridan, WY 82801. The telephone number is (307) 674-2600.

We can also be reached via the internet. Information about the Bighorn National Forest, as well as links to an online version of the Revised Forest Plan and DEIS, can be found on the our web page. The web page address is:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/planning.htm>

P R E F A C E

Forest Plan Amendment and Revision

Forest Plan Amendment – During plan implementation, evaluation of monitoring results may reveal that the Forest Plan needs to be changed. Changes are made by amending the plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)).

There are two types of amendments: significant and non-significant. Generally speaking, significant amendments are those that affect the long-term balance of goods and services produced on the Forest. The Regional Forester is the responsible official for significant amendments. Conversely, non-significant amendments are those which do not have a long-term effect on the balance of goods and services produced by the Forest. The Forest Supervisor is the responsible official for non-significant amendments.

Forest Plan Revision – The Forest Supervisor is required to review the conditions of the land at least every five years to determine if a revision is necessary. If monitoring and evaluation indicate that immediate changes in the forest plan are needed and the changes can't be handled in an amendment, plan revision becomes necessary.

In the case of the Bighorn National Forest, after examining the 1985 Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor concluded many of the existing Forest-wide goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area prescriptions should be considered for change and therefore, recommended to the Regional Forester the Forest Plan be revised.

The Regional Forester is the official responsible for reviewing and approving Forest Plan revisions.

Integration with Forest Service Directives System

Management direction in the Forest Service Directive System, including the Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Forest Service Handbook (FSH), is part of management Plan's management direction and is appropriately reference within the management Plan. Many of these are listed in Plan Appendix B. Management direction also includes applicable laws, regulations and policies, although they might not be restated in the management plan. Many of the applicable laws and regulations are listed in Plan Appendix C.

Understanding the Bighorn National Forest

The Bighorn National Forest is located in north central Wyoming's Big Horn Mountain range. The Forest contains 1,112,429 acres which includes 7,450 acres of State and private land.

The Forest is located approximately midway between Yellowstone and Mount Rushmore National Parks. Three highways, classified as Scenic Byways, cross the mountains. The Forest offers year-round recreation opportunities. In addition, it administer over 500 special use permits including communication sites, reservoirs, easements, power lines, outfitter guides, campground concession operations and lodges/resorts. More than 28,000 cattle and 21,000 sheep graze on the National Forest

under special use permit. Through the end of 2000, after fifteen years of implementation, the Forest has offered approximately 131 million board feet of timber and firewood.

The Bighorn is subdivided into 3 administrative units, known as Ranger Districts, with offices located in Sheridan, Buffalo and Lovell, Wyoming. The Forest Supervisor's Office is co-located with the District Office in Sheridan.

Physical Environment

The Bighorn Mountains are an isolated range rising from rolling plains country which is approximately 4,000 feet in elevation. The mountains rise to an elevation of 13,175 feet above sea level at the summit of Cloud Peak. The ruggedly glaciated, barren granite peaks slope off to the more gently rolling, timbered ridges and drainages that constitute the bulk of the Bighorn mountains. Here the terrain is almost plateau-like, ranging in elevation from approximately 7,000 to 9,000 feet. At the Forest boundary, the terrain drops off suddenly to the surrounding plains and rolling foothills.

All of the watersheds originating on the Forest drain into the Yellowstone River through the Big Horn, Tongue, and Powder Rivers. The Yellowstone is part of the Missouri River Basin system.

The precipitation patterns of the Bighorn mountains are similar to those throughout the Rocky Mountains. The growing season is from mid-May through August. Five to six inches of precipitation falls during this season, most of it as showers at the beginning of the growing season or as snow at the end of the growing season. The average frost-free period is from about June 15 to August 20. Winters are long and cold and last from October 15 through April. At elevations above 9,000 feet, however, snowstorms and frost can occur at any time during the summer months.

Biological Environment

The Bighorn National Forest has about 728,000 acres of forested land, amounting to approximately 65% of the Forest. Principle species include lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce and subalpine fir. Ponderosa pine, limber pine and Douglas-fir are found at the lower elevations. Non-forested lands include grassy meadows, shrub lands, alpine tundra, and rocky areas.

The Bighorn National Forest provides important and unique plant and animal habitat similar to other mountain ranges within the Rocky Mountain region. Rare species including the threatened lynx, the Forest Service sensitive Yellowstone cutthroat trout, water vole, pine marten, bats, amphibians, and other species are associated with the Forest. Mule deer, elk, moose, black bear, and mountain lions are also present and provide excellent viewing and hunting opportunities on the Forest. Numerous streams and lakes provide sport fisheries stocked with rainbow trout, brook trout, and brown trout.

P R E F A C E

Social and Economic Environment

Big Horn, Johnson, Sheridan, and Washakie counties contain the entirety of the Forest. The Forest represents a substantial portion of the four counties ranging from less than five percent in Washakie County to almost twenty-five percent for Sheridan County. In addition to employment, the Bighorn NF provides commodities, recreation and scenic opportunities for the residents of the four counties.

All four counties have experienced volatile population shifts, but the timing has not been uniform across the counties, mainly because they have different economic bases which have flourished or suffered in different periods. The counties all have relatively old populations, with a median of nearly 40, and low numbers particularly in the 20-24 age group, and none have much ethnic diversity (Blevins and Jackson, 2002).

The Forest provides a wide variety of recreational activities, which play a role in the social and economic environment of local communities. Timber harvest has been a historic use on the Forest since before the turn of the previous century. Jobs and income generated from timber harvest contribute to local communities.