



July 2003

Issue Number 7

From the Forest Supervisor

Dear Bighorn National Forest landowner,

We are a little over half-way through the scheduled four-year revision process, and I want to thank all of you who have participated in the process so far. We received many important comments and valuable information from local citizens, and from people from all over the United States. My staff and I know who we work for – the citizens of the United States. Your participation is making a difference as we consider future management of the Bighorn National Forest.

We spent most of the last year developing the draft Revised Forest Plan. Most of the *current version* of the draft Plan is available for review at our website: www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/planning/plan_revision/plan_revision_menu.htm. I stress *current version*, because we are developing this direction with citizen's involvement. In the past, we would typically visit with people during initial scoping meetings, then go away for 2-3 years, and out would pop a Draft Plan. For the Bighorn revision, we have tried to 'daylight' this process, so people can help *build* the draft Revised Plan, instead of just commenting on a published draft Revised Plan.

I want to share some thoughts on the next steps of the revision process – the effects analysis and selection of a preferred alternative. We are analyzing effects for 6 action alternatives and comparing them to a baseline No Action Alternative. The effects analysis measures a variety of resources and human uses and helps us envision what the Bighorn National Forest will be like in the future. Once we estimate the effects and outputs of the various alternatives, and consider the costs and benefits of each, we will discuss which alternative provides the greatest public benefit. Based on your input and the data available in the effects analysis, the Regional Forester and I will select a preferred alternative for the Draft Revised Plan.

Finally, I want you to be aware that I am anticipating changes between the Draft and the Final Plans. I know many people consider a Draft to be "final", but I want to produce a Forest Plan that best serves you, the landowners of the Bighorn National Forest. This includes making changes in response to public comments received on the Draft Revised Plan.

Thanks again for taking part in the management of *your* National Forest!

Bill Bass, Forest Supervisor

What's Been Happening Since January?

The Steering Committee met monthly and is scheduled to meet again on July 18 and 19 (see page 5). The steering committee is comprised of the Bighorn National Forest leadership team (District Rangers and Forest Supervisor's Staff), the state of Wyoming through a cooperating agency agreement, and the state working group. The working group is comprised of County Commissioners and Conservation District board members from the four-county area and representatives from various state agencies.

Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Revised Forest Plan: Forest Service interdisciplinary team members have been working on the following sections:

Chapter 2 of the DEIS discusses the **alternatives**. Each alternative describes a different path that management of the Bighorn NF can follow over the next decade. The alternatives were developed

based on public input since the scoping meetings in early 2001 and were revised based on people's comments in the January 2003 meetings.

Chapter 3 of the DEIS describes the **affected environment**. This section sets the stage for understanding the effects anticipated under each alternative.

Chapter 4 of the Revised Plan is the **monitoring section**. Annual monitoring is done to insure the plan is implemented properly, and to indicate if things have changed enough to warrant a plan amendment or revision.

Effects Analysis: This is an extremely important part of the DEIS. Estimated costs and benefits, pros and cons, for each alternative are compared, so that we can discuss which alternative will provide the 'best' mix of goods and services from the Bighorn NF over the next decade.

More About the Alternatives

A more detailed description of the alternatives can be found at: www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn/planning/plan_revision/plan_revision_menu.htm. All alternatives except the No Action Alternative have the new goals/objectives, standards/guidelines, monitoring direction, and management areas.

No Action

1985 Forest Plan, plus amendments, as being implemented today.

Alternative A

Keeps 1985 Plan management area boundaries. New goals/objectives, standards/guidelines, Management Area direction are included.

Alternative B

Emphasizes biological and habitat diversity.

Alternative C

Maintains existing roadless areas; identifies additional wilderness opportunities.

Alternative D

Updates the 1985 Forest Plan based on implementation and monitoring.

Alternative E

Emphasizes forest vegetation management primarily through timber harvest.

Alternative G

Implements the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (see Roadless, page 5).

Recap of January Meetings

Six meetings were held in January, 2003 in Lovell, Greybull, Worland, Sheridan, Buffalo, and Gillette. The 350 people who attended received an update on where we were in the revision process and an overview of the draft alternatives. The five draft alternatives presented were developed using people's comments from the first round of public meetings, from steering committee input, and from monitoring implementation of the 1985 Forest Plan. Alternatives can be thought of as potential management trajectories or paths into the future – each has a different objective and will result in a slightly different Bighorn National Forest 10, 20, or 50 years from now.

The alternatives varied from Alternative C which considered four new potential wilderness areas to Alternative E which would allocate nearly all of the area legally available for timber harvest to a timber harvest emphasis.

People at the meetings were asked to consider whether the alternatives reflected previous public input and whether they provided an adequate range to cover the major issues. Among the comments received were:

"I used to come to these meetings thinking the answer was obvious - all the people I know are pretty like minded as to how the Forest should be managed. However, this meeting opened up my eyes as to the different ways that people want to see the Bighorn managed."

"I hope BNF maintains wild areas"

"No more wilderness"

"Keep the Bighorns accessible to the public"



"Please do continue to uphold multiple use of our forest. It is a treasure for us all – to be used as well as guarded."

"I feel that the alternatives have addressed the major issues, but the best alternative may be one that combines the best features of all the alternatives developed so far."

People's input from the meetings and other discussions indicated that the range of five alternatives covered the major issues and provided a wide range of potential future management scenarios. The purpose of the alternatives is to examine, through the effects analysis, the estimated benefits and costs, pros and cons, for each alternative. That will lead to the discussion of which alternative will provide the 'best' mix of goods and services from the Bighorn NF over the next decade and beyond.

Roadless Area Conservation Rule

After a recent court ruling (4/14/2003), the January 12, 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) is once again applicable to National Forest System lands. Approximately 56% of the Bighorn National Forest is within Inventoried Roadless Areas under the RACR, which prohibits road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest, with certain exceptions.

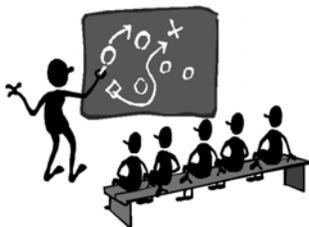
In a news release dated June 9, 2003, Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman said that while the U.S. Department of Agriculture will implement the RACR, the Forest Service will begin an amendment process which would, among other things, allow Governors to seek relief for 'exceptional circumstances.'

Cont. on page 5

Where Are We in the Revision Process?

January 2001

Public meetings: Initial scoping



2001

Compile existing
condition assessments

2002

Draft goals & objectives,
standards & guidelines, &
alternatives

January 2003

Public meetings: Review
preliminary alternatives

Spring/Summer 2003

Conduct effects analysis

July 19, 2003

Steering Committee meeting:
Field trip (public welcome)

Fall 2003

Select a Preferred Alternative
for Draft EIS

February/March 2004

Public meetings: Learn
about and discuss Draft EIS
and Draft Plan

January 2004

Publish Draft EIS and
Draft Revised Plan

2004

Correct/amend draft
documents

January 2005

Publish Final EIS and
Final Revised Plan



Upcoming Events

Steering Committee Meeting July 18

A forest plan revision steering committee meeting is tentatively scheduled for July 18, from 1 to 4 p.m at the Elks Lodge, 622 Greybull Ave. in Greybull. Topics for discussion include potential impacts of the lynx conservation strategy on Forest activities and uses and a review of standards and guidelines.

If you have questions about the meeting or for confirmation of the meeting schedule and location, please call Bernie Bornong, 307-674-2685, with the Bighorn National Forest.

We're on the Web at
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn>
Call or write
307-674-2600
2013 Eastside Second Street
Sheridan, WY 82801

Steering Committee Hosts Field Trip July 19

The Steering Committee for the Bighorn forest plan revision will be holding a field trip on July 19, and the public is invited to attend and participate in the discussion. We will meet at Bear Lodge at 9 a.m. for a short orientation, then visit Shell Canyon for the morning.

Topics to be discussed on the morning leg will center around forest health, forest vegetation management, and timber harvest opportunities. We will return to Bear Lodge for lunch (a sandwich bar buffet is planned for around \$5-7 per person). The afternoon field session topics will include water quality and soils management and livestock grazing. A 4 p.m. return to Bear Lodge is scheduled.

Transportation will be by car pooling, and we will be staying on the highway or gravel roads. Outdoor wear is suggested, although there will only be a minimal amount of walking.

The format for the field sessions will be a short presentation by Forest Service people, followed by a presentation from one or more persons affected by the management issue at hand. For example, at the forest vegetation management stop, we plan to have a member of timber industry describe how forest management on the Bighorn National Forest affects their industry and community.

Roadless *Possible Changes on the Forest* cont. from page 3

The circumstance that may most affect the Bighorn NF is the one that allows for "...technical corrections such as boundary adjustments to remove existing roaded areas." The Bighorn NF Inventoried Roadless Areas have many forest system roads. The Secretary's press release can be viewed at: www.usda.gov/news/releases/2003/06/0200.htm.

Because of the changing roadless situation, we will consider the effects of the RACR for the Draft Revised Plan as follows:

- For previously developed Alternatives A-E, we will analyze the effects of the RACR on each alternative.
- A new alternative, G, will be developed and analyzed. This alternative will fully implement the RACR.

The RACR can be downloaded or viewed at:
<http://roadless.fs.fed.us/documents/rule/index.shtml>.

What's Coming Up ...

July 18 Steering Committee Meeting
(tentative) in Greybull, WY

July 19 Field Trip. Meet at Bear Lodge

Meetings - Please let us know if we can visit with you or your group about the Forest Plan revision process – we want to keep people informed, plus we value your input!

Where are we in the Revision Process?

The Forest Plan Interdisciplinary Team (ID team) is working on Chapters 2 & 3 of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Chapter 4 of the Draft Revised Plan, and the Effects Analysis.

For a complete forest plan revision schedule, see page 4.



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