United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service
Willamette National Forest
Supervisor's Office
3106 Pierce Parkway Suite D
Springfield, OR 97477

File Code: 1900
Date: August 20, 2015

Dear Interested Citizen,

The 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) requires the Willamette to establish a land management plan monitoring program by May 9, 2016, or as soon as practicable, that is consistent with the new Planning Rule's monitoring requirements. We have reviewed our existing Willamette and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) monitoring program (found on pages V-1 to V-60) to determine what modifications are needed to conform to the new monitoring requirements. We wanted to take this opportunity to share our new monitoring program with you and request your input.

2012 Planning Rule

As defined by the Planning Rule, monitoring is continuous and provides feedback for the planning cycle by testing relevant assumptions, tracking relevant conditions over time, and measuring management effectiveness (36 CFR 219.12). The Planning Rule includes eight monitoring requirements.

(i) The status of select watershed conditions.

(ii) The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

(iii) The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under §219.9.

(iv) The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under §219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern.

(v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.

(vi) Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.

(vii) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.

(viii) The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).

The Willamette's new Forest Plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the monitoring requirements. The monitoring questions are tied to specific Forest Plan components, which include desired future

conditions, plan objectives, and standards and guidelines. They must focus on providing the information necessary to evaluate whether Forest Plan components are effective and appropriate, and whether management is being effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the Forest. The monitoring questions in the Forest Plan were used as a starting point for developing the new Forest Plan monitoring program. Indicators are quantitative or qualitative variables that can be measured or described and, when observed periodically, show trends in conditions that are relevant to the associated monitoring questions.

Focal Species

Every Forest Plan monitoring program must identify focal species along with monitoring questions and associated indicators to track the status of the identified focal species in order to comply with monitoring requirement. Focal species are "a small subset of species whose status permits inference to the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs and provides meaningful information regarding the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area. Focal species would be commonly selected on the basis of their functional role in ecosystems" (36 CFR 219.19).

Management indicator species (MIS) in the Forest Plan, which are discussed on pages II-7 through IV-11, IV-16, and IV-64, were used as a starting point for identifying focal species. Currently, the Forest has seven wildlife species, several bird species and all salmonids listed as management indicator species. The wildlife and fish species are listed in following table.

Rationale for the Interim Focal Species

Table 1. Willamette NF Proposed Change From Wildlife Terrestrial MIS to Interim Focal Species

1990 MIS	Interim Focal Species	Rational
Bald Eagle	**drop**	**Recovered; habitat condition will be tracked with trout/salmon focal species and riparian/stream ecological condition monitoring; protect at the project level by evaluation as sensitive species and Biological Evaluations**
Peregrine Falcon	**drop**	**Recovered and no longer USFWS post-listing monitoring concern; no longer key forest issue; protect at the project level by evaluation as sensitive species and Biological Evaluations**
Marten	**Marten**	**Species of higher elevation (>4000' elev.) mature and late successional forests: indicator of deadwood levels at higher elev. forests**

Table 1. Willamette NF Proposed Change From Wildlife Terrestrial MIS to Interim Focal Species		
1990 MIS	**Interim Focal Species**	**Rational**
Pileated Woodpecker	**Pileated Woodpecker**	**Indicator for deadwood levels and mature and late successional forest condition particularly in the Douglas fir/western hemlock zone**
Northern spotted owl	**Drop as focal-track under (iv) recovery of T&E species**	**T&E species that is key component of forest management plan**
Elk	**Elk**	**Providing elk habitat and hunting opportunities is still an important public issue; also indicator of amount of early seral habitat; elk is more sensitive to road management than deer; have elk model for habitat suitability**
Deer	**drop**	**Rely on elk to track the concern for deer hunting and the amount of early seral habitat; deer is a duplicate of the same issue and concern so it is redundant; no specific deer habitat model so we rely on elk model to represent deer habitat condition**
Primary Cavity Excavators-(8 species of birds besides pileated woodpecker identified in Forest Plan, one of which does not nest on the Willamette but occurs in high elevation areas during fall dispersal movements)	**drop**	**Monitoring for other species will track the habitat conditions of these primary cavity excavators. Monitoring for marten will track habitat condition for Lewis woodpecker (fall dispersal), northern-three toed, and black-backed woodpecker; monitoring for pileated woodpecker and northern spotted owl will track the habitat condition of the remaining species.**
N/A	**N/A**	**Add monitoring question for Oregon spotted frogs under (iv) recovery of T&E species**
T and E Listed Fish Species (spring chinook salmon, winter steelhead and bull trout)	**Drop as focal-track under (iv) recovery of T&E species**	**Populations will be tracked and habitat condition will be monitored in accordance with T and E consultation and recovery plans. T and E species are a key component of Forest Management Plans.**

Table 1. Willamette NF Proposed Change From Wildlife Terrestrial MIS to Interim Focal Species		
1990 MIS	**Interim Focal Species**	**Rational**
Resident Trout	**Resident Trout, lamprey, Oregon Chub**	**Populations will be tracked and habitat condition will be monitored. Protect at the project level by evaluation as sensitive/focal species. Biological Evaluations will assess project effects.**

Based on how well the species serve as indicators of ecological integrity and existing Forest Plan components, along with the anticipated time until the completion of Forest Plan revision, the following is proposed for the transition period.

- Continue to monitor elk, pileated woodpecker, and pine marten as interim focal species.
  - Elk are indicators of early seral habitat;
  - Pileated woodpeckers are indicators of mature and late successional habitat; and
  - Pine marten are indicators of mature and late successional habitat above 3500 feet.

- Remove Bald Eagle, Peregrine Falcon, Pine Marten, Norther Spotted Owl, Anadromous Fish, and Trout given they are monitored under Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Northern spotted owl is monitored as part of the Northwest Forest Plan and Northern Spotted Owl Recovery Plan.

- Continue to monitor T and E fish species as guided by Recovery Plans and through consultation requirements. Resident trout, lamprey, and the recently delisted Oregon Chub will be monitored as an interim focal species as they are good indicators of aquatic ecosystem health.

The interim focal species for the Forest will be re-evaluated during the Forest Plan revision process and will likely change through that process based on the corresponding changes to Forest Plan components (e.g., standards and guidelines).

Administrative Changes

In order to implement the new Forest Plan monitoring program, the Forest will be making the following change. First, the new Forest Plan monitoring program (attached) would replace the existing monitoring program described on Forest Plan pages V-1 to V-62.

The changes will be made using an administrative change under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). An administrative change (36 CFR 219.13(c)) is any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or plan revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statutory or regulatory requirements, or changes to other content in the plan, including the monitoring program (§ 219.7(f)(iii)).

Forest Plan Monitoring Program

The Forest will prepare its first monitoring report under this new program in fiscal year 2016. The biennial monitoring evaluation report will use the indicators to answer the monitoring questions and evaluate the trends. The report will document whether a change to the Forest Plan or change to the monitoring program is warranted based on new information or whether there is no need for change at that time as required by the Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.5).

Public Input

As required by the 2012 Planning Rule, a substantive change to the monitoring program made outside of the process for plan revision or amendment may be made only after notice to the public of the intended change and consideration of public comment (§ 219.16(c)(6)). We would invite your comments on these proposed administrative changes and the specific monitoring questions and indicators. These documents are also available electronically at:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/willamette/landmanagement/planning

The Forest Service would like your comments by September 25, 2015. Comments may be submitted to https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public/CommentInput?project=NP-660.

Please send your written comments to:

Allison Reger
Willamette National Forest
3106 Pierce Parkway
Eugene, Oregon 97477
FAX: (543) 225-6377

You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours which are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. All those who comment will remain on our mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

If you have any questions concerning this proposal, please contact Allison Reger at areger@fs.fed.us or 541-225-6444; or Suzanne Schindler at sschindler@fs.fed.us or 541-225-6436.

Sincerely,

TRACY BECK
Forest Supervisor