

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This Forest Plan represents an adaptive management approach for *National Forests in Florida*. Adaptive management is a concept that can mean different things to different people. To Forest Service employees, numerous partnerships in Federal, State, and local governments, academic institutions, conservation organizations, and Florida citizenry, it means practicing ecosystem management with the intuitive understanding that we are students of nature, not masters of it.

Adaptive management is using our scientific knowledge and experience to design management strategies that allow us to progress toward our ecological and socioeconomic objectives as we learn. The adaptive aspect of these strategies is the ability to test our assumptions and make adjustments as we learn from our work and the work of others in the field.

As a holistic model, adaptive management covers a broad spectrum of activities and practices. With sustainable forests and healthy ecosystems as primary goals, a great deal of knowledge is being tested; and there are many factors to monitor over time. This is why adapting or adjusting management practices cannot be done in isolation of the bigger picture. Socioeconomic and aesthetic values are tied to recreation, timber, wildlife, and ecosystem restoration objectives.

Monitoring is the heart of adaptive management. To ensure that all factors are considered before initiating change, an Interdisciplinary (ID) Team—very much expanded from the team that developed the Forest Plan—will review the situation. This expanded team includes professionals from all levels of the Forest Service, scientists from research units in the South, and colleagues from local academic institutions.

The Forest Service, with its research capability and practical experience, is positioned to advance both forestry and ecosystem management into the twenty-first century. *National Forests in Florida* believes an adaptive management concept will make a major contribution toward this advancement. In any event, Forest Service employees and national forest (NF) partners are encouraged by these words of René Dubos:

. . . by using scientific knowledge and ecological wisdom we can manage the earth so as to create environments which are ecologically stable, economically profitable, esthetically rewarding and favorable to the continued growth of civilization.¹

¹ René Dubos, B. Y. Morrison Memorial Lecture, Annual Meeting, American Assn. for Advancement of Science, Washington, D.C., 1972, quoted by John O. Simonds, *Earthscape: A Manual of Environmental Planning* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1978).

This Forest Plan guides all natural resource management activities and sets management standards for *National Forests in Florida*. It describes resource management practices, levels of resource production and management, and the availability and suitability of lands for resource management.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA), implementing regulations, and other documents guided the preparation of this Forest Plan. Land-use determinations, management practices, goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines are statements of the Forest Plan's management direction. Projected yields, services, and rate of implementation are dependent on the annual budgeting process.

This Forest Plan provides broad program-level direction for management of the land and its resources. Future projects carry out the direction in this Forest Plan. This Forest Plan does not contain a commitment to select any specific project. An environmental analysis is conducted, when required, on these projects as they are proposed. This analysis may tie to the data and evaluations in other environmental impact statements.

In addition to direction found in this Forest Plan, projects also are implemented through direction found in the Forest Service directive system (manuals and handbooks) and other guides (*see* Chapter 5, "Monitoring, Evaluation, Research, and Implementation").

Relationship of the Forest Plan to Environmental Impact Statements

This Forest Plan is the preferred alternative for managing the land and resources that are analyzed and described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Other decisions providing management direction are:

- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1995)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, June 1984)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle, Southern Region* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, April 1987)
- *Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region, February 1989) **as supplemented (September, 2002.) Amendment #1**

There are several exceptions to these Regional directions.

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Management of the Red-cockaded Woodpecker and its Habitat on National Forests in the Southern Region:

Standards and Guidelines - WL-1 deviates from the Record of Decision by reducing foraging requirements on the Apalachicola Ranger District (RD).

Standards and Guidelines - WL-2 permits thinning below minimal levels established in the Record of Decision.

Standards and Guidelines - WL-3 permits exceeding even-aged harvesting restrictions in the next 10 years by allowing irregular shelterwood harvest in slash pine of up to 1,000 acres on the Apalachicola RD, 500 acres on the Wakulla RD, and 300 acres on the Osceola NF.

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement Standards and Guidelines for the Southern Regional Guide:

Standards and Guidelines - VG-18 deviates from Regional Stocking Guides to include a wider range of stocking levels for longleaf, slash, and sand pine.

Standards and Guidelines - 8.1-3 and 8.2-3 deviate from the Regional guide for regeneration harvest size for sand pine.

Record of Decision, Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Coastal Plain/Piedmont:

Standards and Guidelines - FI-6 deviates from the Record of Decision by allowing growing-season burns on the same site without timing restrictions.

~~Direction is included in the Forestwide Standards and Guidelines (3-26) which clarifies the appropriate methods of project level inventory/surveys for TES species when conducting biological evaluations. This is a change in language found on page A-1, Section I. A. (2) of the Vegetation Management Record of Decision.~~
Amendment #1

Plan Structure

The Forest Plan consists of five chapters, a glossary, and several appendixes.

Chapter 1 introduces the Forest Plan; explains its purpose, structure, and relationship to other documents; includes a brief description of the forest; and summarizes the issues and analysis of the management situation for the revision.

Chapter 2 shows the forestwide desired future conditions, goals, and objectives.

Chapter 3 shows the forestwide standards and guidelines.

Chapter 4 shows the management area goals, desired future conditions, standards, and guidelines.

Chapter 5 gives direction on Forest Plan implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Appendixes provide supplemental information about the Forest Plan.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) were published in January 1997 with a 120-day public comment period. More than 800 copies of these documents were distributed to the public via mail and during public meetings. From February through April 1997, a series of 17 public workshops were held throughout the state.

By the end of the comment period, more than 400 letters had been received. These letters contained more than 4,000 individual comments. The comments were reviewed by the ID Team and the forest Leadership Team and changes were agreed on in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and Final Forest Plan based on these comments. The comments and responses are found in Appendix G of the FEIS.

Summary of Issues

Public involvement is a key part of the planning process. Public comments were used to identify what the forest should be in the future—including goods, services, and environmental conditions. Opportunities were offered for people to get involved in the planning process and to provide comments. Issues submitted by the public, as well as from within the Forest Service, guided the need to change current management strategies. Many of the issues listed below were obtained from two appeals of the Forest Plan (1986). Other issues were submitted by the public during efforts conducted by Forest Service personnel from 1990 to 1995.

On March 27, 1990, a scoping letter was sent to interested and affected publics, asking for comments on 10 preliminary issues to be addressed in the significant amendment of the Forest Plan.

On January 2, 1991, another letter was sent to the public listing the desired future conditions that were proposed for the significant amendment. When the decision was made to revise the Forest Plan, an additional letter was sent on July 14, 1992, asking for comments on issues for the revision.

Based on previous public comments, four preliminary alternatives were developed and descriptions were mailed to the public in January 1995. Public meetings were held throughout the state, and comments were solicited on the preliminary alternatives.

Preliminary issues and the additional issues identified through public involvement were stated in the form of planning questions to be addressed in the planning process. The issues and planning questions are summarized into the following questions, used to develop alternatives for the Forest Plan revision.

- How much and by what methods should the longleaf pine-wiregrass community be restored and maintained?
- How should we maintain the sand pine-scrub oak community?
- How should we manage and protect riparian and wetland areas?

- How should special aquatic, botanic, geologic, historic, paleontologic, and scenic areas be protected and managed?
- What lands should be designated as wilderness, and what practices should be permitted in these areas?
- What types, amounts, and mix of recreational opportunities should be provided, and what consideration should be given to compatibility of users?
- What should be the access policy for motorized vehicles?
- What is the proper combination of open and closed roads to meet public needs?
- How should we manage habitat to enhance certain wildlife populations—such as game and proposed, endangered, threatened, and sensitive species?
- What will be the level of timber harvest, and what silvicultural systems will be used to manage the forests?
- What types of other forest products will be gathered and what uses will be permitted on the national forests?

Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation

In addition to the emerging issues, the “Analysis of the Management Situation for National Forests in Florida” determined the need for change based on the results of monitoring, other policy and direction since 1986, 5-year review, current condition of the resources, and supply and demand factors.

This analysis also determined the ability of the planning area covered by the Forest Plan to supply goods and services in response to society’s demands and to provide a basis for formulating a broad range of reasonable alternatives. A summary of the major findings of this analysis follows.

- Since 1986, several changes in policy and social trends affected management of the national forests. Increasing interest in environmental issues and public land management led to greater public involvement in decision making.
- In June 1992, the Chief issued a policy of ecosystem management of the national forests with direction for reduction in clearcutting on the national forests. The Forest Plan needed to be revised to incorporate fully these decisions and policies.
- The Forest Plan needed to incorporate the recommended 1990 Resources Planning Act Program.

- The Forest Plan needed to provide goals and objectives for ecological restoration and maintenance.
- A broader range of silvicultural systems and harvest methods needed to be evaluated and guidelines incorporated into the Forest Plan.
- Many of the management area allocations were too broad to provide meaningful direction using an ecological approach to management.
- The Forest Plan needed to include the ecological classification system being developed by the Forest Service.
- Monitoring and evaluation strategy of the Forest Plan needed to be revised to answer whether we are achieving the goals, objectives, and desired future conditions of the Forest Plan rather than emphasizing outputs and activities.
- The demand for recreation is expected to increase in the future. Activities expected to have the greatest increase in demand are fishing, visiting historical sites, and recreational vehicle camping. Demand for hunting is increasing at a slower rate than other recreational activities. The demand in terms of number of recreation visitor-days on the forests is greatest in driving for pleasure, camping, picnicking, fishing, hunting, and waterfront activities. The national forests supply large areas of semiprimitive and rural landscapes suited for dispersed recreation activities such as hiking, horseback riding, hunting, motorized use, nature study, and trail bicycle riding. More direction for the mix and types of developed recreation facilities was needed. More specific direction was needed on the proper mix, amount, and compatibility of uses of the trail system and more specifics on the off-highway vehicle policy.
- Wilderness use on the forests is low, due to the swampy terrain and summer heat. At present, the supply of designated wilderness is sufficient for the recreational demand. Recreation use is one element in the demand for wilderness. Other wilderness values include ecological, spiritual, and psychological values. Recommendations were needed for disposition of wilderness study areas.
- Recommendations were needed for candidate research natural areas.
- No rivers in the forests are included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Seven rivers on or bordering the forests are included on the National Rivers Inventory. Evaluations and recommendations were needed for these rivers.
- The Forest Plan needed to be revised to include the new Scenery Management System.
- The Forest Plan needed to be revised to give better direction on the goals and objectives of the fisheries program and standards and guidelines for fisheries management.

- The determination of habitat management areas and population objectives for red-cockaded woodpeckers (RCWs) was needed to conform to Regional direction.
- The management indicator species selected for the Forest Plan needed to be reviewed considering new information, the emphasis on an ecological approach to ecosystem management, and the concern for Neotropical migratory birds.
- Consumption of beef in the United States has decreased since 1976. Demand for forestland grazing has declined since 1986. In Florida, there are 132,228 acres suitable for grazing on the national forests, with a carrying capacity of 59,471 animal unit months. In 1996, about 336 cattle were grazing on the forests. Objectives for range use and forage improvement needed to be revised.
- Within the market area for timber on the national forests in Florida, softwood harvest is expected to increase by about 30 percent in the next 20 years. This indicates a tight supply in the area for the next 5-10 years for softwood sawtimber. Hardwood inventory is expected to remain relatively flat. In 1988, harvest from the national forests in Florida was about 3 percent of the market area. The national forests contain 8 percent of the total growing stock in the state; however, 44 percent of the growing stock more than 50 years old in Florida is on the national forests. The allowable sale quantity needed to be recalculated to account for the effects of ecosystem management and RCW guidelines.
- More direction was needed for prioritizing land exchanges and acquisitions.
- The Forest Plan needed to be revised to include new levels of road construction, reconstruction, maintenance, and closure.
- Prescribed burning goals and levels needed to be revised and air quality information needed to be augmented.
- About 1,000 special-use permits affect about 8,000 acres on the national forests in Florida. The future demand for special land uses is expected to increase. The Forest Plan needed to include guidance on the appropriate uses of the national forests for permitting special uses on the forests.
- The demand for oil and gas leasing in and around national forest land is low and interest in oil and gas exploration is a remote possibility.

