

# Chapter 1

## FOREST PLAN INTRODUCTION

### Purpose of the Forest Plan

The Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) guides all natural resource management activities and establishes management guidance for the Hoosier National Forest. The Forest Plan describes resource management opportunities and the availability and suitability of lands for resource management.

The Forest Plan embodies the provisions of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the implementing regulations, and other guiding documents. Land use determinations, goals, and guidance constitute a statement of the management direction. The projected outputs, services, and rates of implementing these activities are dependent on the annual budgeting process, additional public involvement, and site-specific project environmental analyses.

The Plan will be revised in accordance with planning regulations or whenever conditions have changed significantly. Site-specific treatments and actions are not included in the Forest Plan. Site-specific analyses and decisions will be done at the project level. The contents of a forest plan include:

- Establishment of forest-wide, multiple-use goals and objectives [36 CFR 219.11(b)];
- Establishment of forest-wide management requirements (guidance or standards and guidelines) to fulfill requirements of NFMA applying to future activities (resource integration requirements of 36 CFR 219.13 to 219.26 and the requirements of 36 CFR 219.27);
- Establishment of management area direction applying to future management activities in that management area [36 CFR 219.11(c)];
- Establishment of allowable timber sale quantity and designation of suitable timber land [36 CFR 219.16 and 219.14];
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements [36 CFR 219.11(d)]; and
- Recommendations to Congress, if any, on designations of additional Wilderness or Wild, Scenic, and Recreational Rivers [36 CFR 219.17 and 219.18].

# Relationship of the Forest Plan to Other Documents

The Forest Plan sets the direction for managing the land and resources of the Hoosier National Forest. Once finalized, the Plan replaces the 1985 Forest Plan and subsequent amendments. The Plan results from extensive analyses and considerations addressed in the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

The planning process and the analysis procedures used to develop the Forest Plan are described in the FEIS, Appendix B. The FEIS also describes the range of alternatives considered in Chapter 2 and discloses their significant environmental effects in Chapter 3.

Site-specific projects will be planned and implemented to carry out the direction in this Plan. Environmental analyses will be performed as needed. These subsequent environmental analyses use data and evaluations in the Forest Plan and FEIS as their basis. Environmental analyses of projects will be tiered to the FEIS accompanying the Forest Plan.

## Organization of the Forest Plan

The Forest Plan document consists of two parts, the Plan and the appendices. The Plan is organized into four chapters.

- Chapter 1 - Introduces the structure of the Forest Plan.
- Chapter 2 - Describes the role of the Hoosier National Forest, its goals and objectives.
- Chapter 3 - Establishes guidance for future management activities. By following this direction, the Forest hopes to achieve the desired conditions.
- Chapter 4 - Explains how management direction will be monitored, evaluated, and kept current in light of changing conditions and assumptions. This chapter also looks at research needs for the Hoosier.
- Appendices - Includes information such as a glossary, detailed summaries, and other required data on specific management practices or outputs.
- Maps, which show National Forest System (NFS) lands and management area boundaries, are included in Appendix J.

In this document the Hoosier National Forest may be referred to as either the "Hoosier" or the "Forest." Either term includes the NFS land base in Indiana, as well as the Forest Service administrative structure.

In this document, the term "Plan" or "Forest Plan" refers to this revised Forest Plan and not to the 1985 Hoosier Forest Plan or the 1991 Forest Plan Amendment, unless clearly referring to a previous forest plan.

## **Forest Location**

The Hoosier National Forest is located in nine counties in southern Indiana (Figure 1.1). Bounded by the Ohio River to the south, the Forest is within a two-hour drive of the metropolitan centers of Cincinnati, Evansville, Indianapolis, and Louisville. The Forest is located among timeless hills and sharp ridges, lakes and streams, diverse stands of hardwoods and pine, springs, caves, and sinkholes.

Principal access routes to the Hoosier are State Route 37 (in a north-south direction from Indianapolis), U.S. Highways 50 and 150, State Highway 64, 66, and 446, and Interstate 64 in an east-west direction.

## **Management Direction**

Management direction provides guidance for managing resources and multiple uses on NFS land. This direction has been developed for resources (for instance, wildlife and vegetation) on a Forest-wide basis and for management areas. Chapter 2 contains management direction that applies Forest-wide, and more specific direction for management areas.

Goals, desired conditions, and objectives always form the purpose and need for site-specific projects. Not every project will further every goal or objective.

## **Goals, Desired Conditions, and Objectives**

Goals and desired conditions are broad statements that describe the situation that the Forest Service will strive to achieve. They are generally timeless and not measurable. Goals and desired conditions describe the ends to be achieved, rather than the means of doing so. They are a narrative description of the state of the land and resources expected when objectives and their associated guidance are fully implemented.

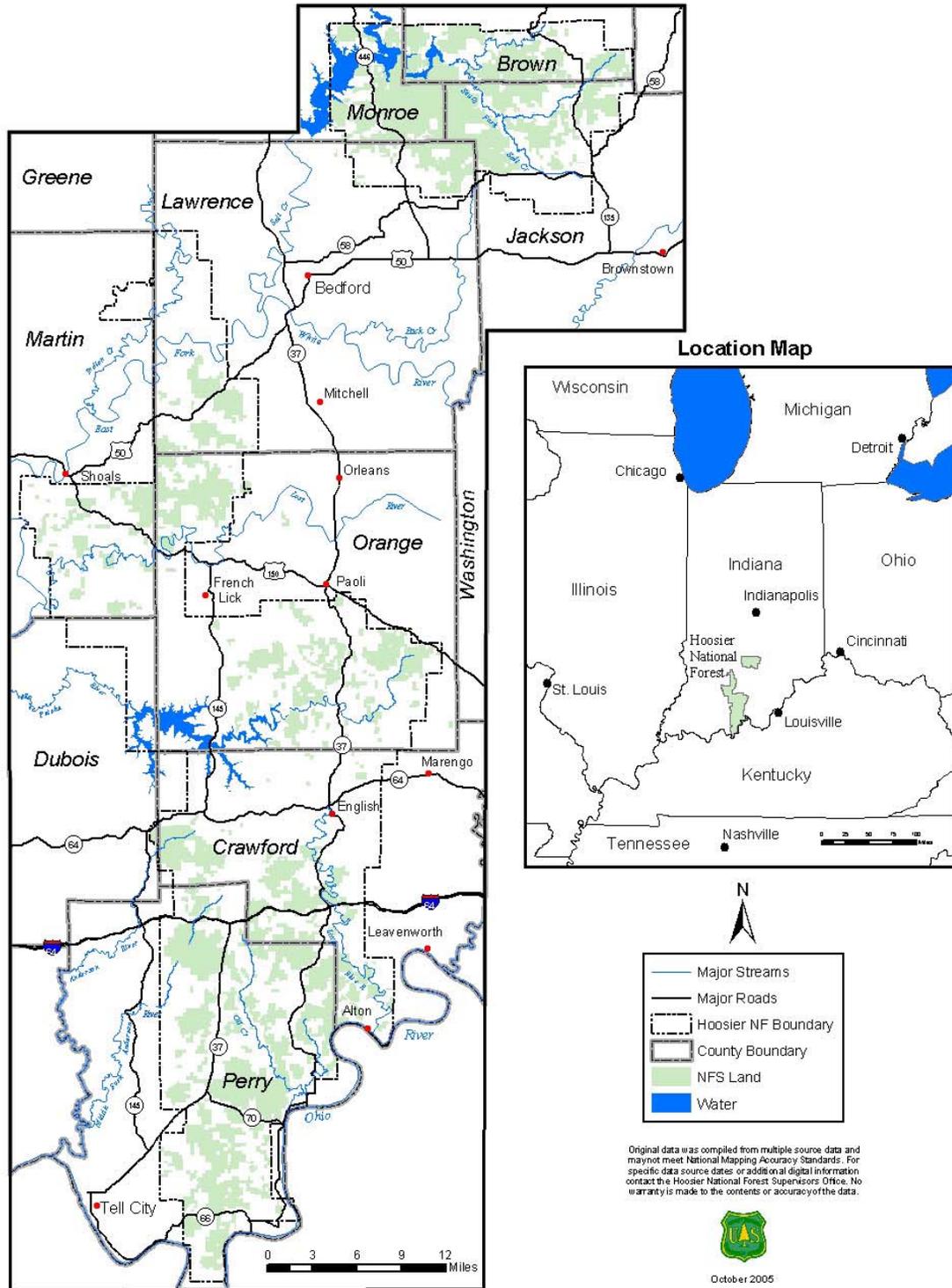
Goals and desired conditions are not absolutes. Their purpose is to ensure that they are considered when planning management activities and that efforts are made to move components toward desired conditions.

In many cases, there will be short-term impediments to reaching desired conditions, such as the current state of the resource, but the long-term aim would be to reach the desired conditions. Some areas on the landscape may be far from the desired condition, while other parts may already be in the desired condition or have a greater likelihood of reaching it soon.

The eight goals are broad statements of the Forest's overall purpose. Desired conditions are described by management areas and provide a vision of what the Forest should look like in the future.

Figure 1.1

# Hoosier National Forest Vicinity Map



Objectives are measurable steps taken within a specified timeframe to move toward a desired condition. Objectives are generally achieved by implementing site-specific projects or activities. However, objectives are not targets. Targets for outputs are dependent upon budgets and may or may not reflect Forest Plan emphasis areas.

Forest-wide objectives have been developed for some resources (see Chapter 2).

## **Guidance**

Guidance or standards and guidelines, found in Chapter 3, are the specific technical direction for managing resources. They provide guidance to implement projects that will move resources toward the desired conditions.

Guidance may apply Forest-wide to NFS land, or may apply specifically to different management areas.

Only measures that are specific to the Hoosier National Forest are included in the guidance. Laws, regulations, and policies that apply to the entire NFS are not reiterated in this guidance section.

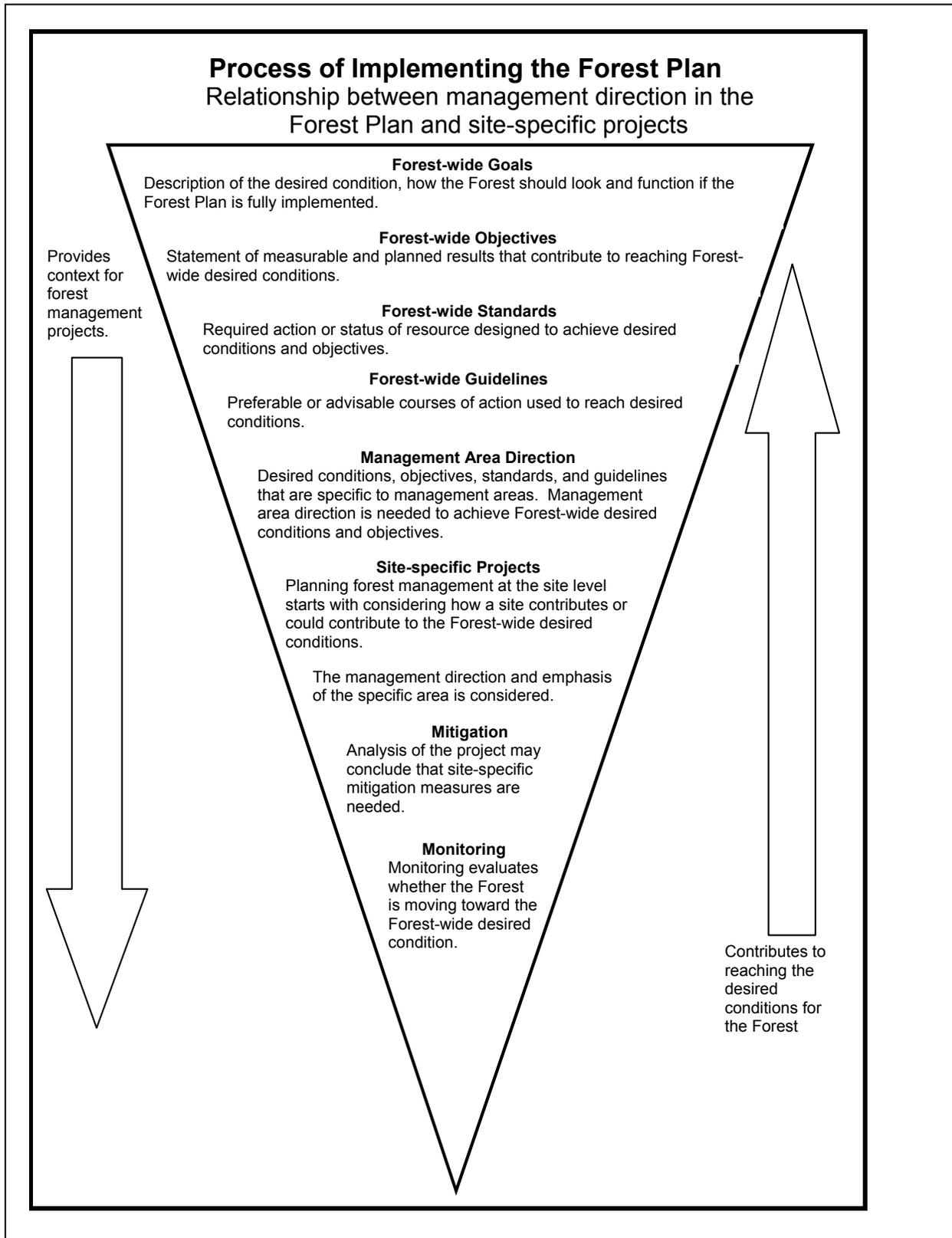
Standards are required limits to activities. These limitations help the Forest reach the desired conditions and objectives. Standards also ensure compliance with laws, regulations, executive orders, and policy direction. Deviations from standards must be analyzed and documented in Forest Plan amendments.

Guidelines are preferable limits or permissions for management actions that may be followed to achieve desired conditions. Guidelines are generally expected to be implemented. They help the Forest reach the desired conditions and objectives in a way that permits operational flexibility to respond to variations over time. Deviations from guidelines must be analyzed during project-level analysis and documented in a project decision, but these deviations do not require a Forest Plan amendment.

## **Implementing the Forest Plan**

The Forest Plan provides a framework to guide the Hoosier National Forest's day-to-day resource management operations (Figure 1.2). It is a strategic, programmatic document that does not make project-level decisions.

Figure 1.2



The National Forest Management Act requires that resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of NFS land be consistent with the Forest Plan. All outstanding and future contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments for use and occupancy will be brought into compliance with the Forest Plan as soon as practical.

## **Principles of Management on the Hoosier National Forest**

Fundamental principles guide management on the Forest. Direction in the Forest Plan adds to and qualifies these principles.

### **Principle 1**

The Forest Service will follow laws and regulations as well as policies in Forest Service Manuals that relate to managing NFS land. The Plan is designed to supplement, not replace, direction from these sources.

### **Principle 2**

The Forest Service will coordinate management activities with the appropriate local, State, or Tribal governments, as well as other Federal agencies.

### **Principle 3**

The Forest Service will collaborate with interested organizations, groups, and individuals.

### **Principle 4**

The Forest Service will manage the Hoosier for multiple uses. The Hoosier is open for any legal public activity or management action, unless restricted by law, policy, or the Forest Plan. While allowed, such activities and actions may require administrative review and authorization before they are implemented.

## **Tools and Techniques**

The Forest will reach its desired vegetative conditions through natural ecological processes and by using a diverse range of management tools and techniques.

To the extent practical, timber management will be used to emulate naturally occurring disturbances (fire and windstorms for instance). These management practices will include both even-aged and uneven-aged techniques. The Forest will use group selection, individual tree selection, and other methods of harvesting to create or maintain uneven-aged stands. The Forest will use shelterwood and clearcutting to create even-aged stands. Clearcutting will only be used when it is the optimal method for resource objectives.

Prescribed fire will be used alone or with silvicultural treatments to mimic the effects of historic fire regimes. Controlled fire will help maintain, enhance, and restore natural ecological

processes. Minimum impact fire suppression tactics should be considered in wildland fire suppression and prescribed fire application to reduce adverse effects.

The Forest will promote re-growth of harvested or other disturbed forests with a variety of regeneration practices. This includes regenerating forests through natural regeneration, tree planting, and seeding. Areas will naturally change through forest succession.

The Forest will also reach desired conditions for human uses by using a diverse range of management tools and techniques. This will include providing recreational opportunities, special forest products, and commodity resources.

Ecological functions of watersheds and riparian areas will be enhanced or restored through techniques such as reconstructing or improving road and trail crossings, decommissioning unneeded roads, using silvicultural treatments or fire to enhance shade, recruiting coarse woody debris, or stabilizing banks in riparian areas.

The Forest may create new roads and trails for site-specific projects or to respond to increased demand. The majority of these roads will be temporary and will be decommissioned when no longer needed.

### **Site-Specific Projects**

Implementing the Forest Plan means developing and implementing site-specific projects to move toward the desired conditions established in the Forest Plan (Figure 1.2).

Project-level compliance with the National Forest Management Act is primarily concerned with consistency with the Plan and the Act's regulations.

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) involves the environmental analysis process for the specific proposal, proper documentation, and public disclosure of effects in an environmental assessment, environmental impact statement, or decision document. When necessary, the Forest will perform environmental analysis on site-specific projects and activities. When required, an analysis file or project file is available for public review, but it is not always necessary to document the analysis in the form of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

Environmental analysis of site-specific projects will use as its basis the data and evaluations in the Forest Plan and the FEIS for the Forest Plan. Environmental analysis of site-specific projects will be tiered to the FEIS accompanying the Plan. By referencing discussions in the Plan and FEIS, subsequent documents will be able to concentrate on issues specific to the proposed action. Discussing environmental effects at the time the project is designed allows for better management decisions.

Thus, there are two levels of decision-making. The first is the development of the Forest Plan, which provides direction for all management programs, practices, uses, and future decisions. The second level is the analysis and implementation of projects. Each of these projects must consider the goals and objectives in this Plan. This process requires land managers to take an integrated look before they make their final project-level decisions.

Site-specific decisions are postponed to the project level, allowing for focused public involvement. By waiting until a project is proposed and then asking for public comments and

involvement, the Forest can ensure people are better informed of the specific activity and its effects, as well as alternative activities.

Project level decisions will be documented following NEPA guidelines.

## **Budgets**

Congress approves the Forest Service's budget on an annual basis. The National Forest System appropriation from Congress provides funds for stewardship and management of all 192 million acres of Federal land and the ecosystems on that land across the country. These appropriated funds are key for translating desired conditions and objectives to on-the-ground results.

This budget results in program development, annual work planning, and monitoring. These processes fund implementation of the Forest Plan and make annual adjustments and changes to reflect current priorities within the overall management direction contained in the Plan. Therefore, the funding distribution between program components and intensity or level of activities in those programs is a reflection of the Plan as well as the will of Congress. The final determining factor in carrying out the intent of the Forest Plan is the level of funding, which dictates the rate of implementation of the Plan.

## **Forest Plan Amendments and Revisions**

One of the important lessons learned during the years of developing and working with forest plans is the unpredictability of the future. Forest Plans must remain flexible even as they guide us toward the desired conditions.

A number of possibilities could prompt consideration of amending or revising the Forest Plan in the future. Every contingency cannot be considered, but the Plan establishes a basic framework for making sound management decisions.

Amendments to the Forest Plan may be recommended if the Forest finds that the prescribed activities are not resolving the issues, that new and more important challenges have been identified that should be addressed, that there are significant changes in demands, that some basic assumptions of the Plan are not valid, or that activities prescribed by the Plan are not achieving desired objectives.

The Forest Supervisor will determine whether an amendment to the Plan would be significant. Amendments will not be considered significant if they only adjust the implementation to reflect differences between proposed and appropriated funding, if they modify a prescription, or if they are minor changes when direction has been found to be unproductive, inefficient, unnecessary, or damaging. An amendment is only considered significant if the change affects the intent of the Plan. If the amendment is not significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the change following public notification and completion of appropriate environmental analysis (Reference FSM 1922.51 and 1922.52).

If the proposed amendment is found to be significant, it could only be implemented by following the same procedure required for development and approval of this Forest Plan.

Forest Plan amendments, if any, will be incorporated into this Plan as an addition, and made available to the public. This ensures the Plan is kept current.

The Forest Plan will be revised pursuant to 36 CFR 219. It also may be revised when the Forest Supervisor determines that changes in conditions of the land, in public demands, or in Resources Planning Act policies, goals, or objectives would have a significant effect on the Forest program. Any revision would go through the same process required for development and approval of this Forest Plan.