

# Appendix A

## ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES AND PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Setting the direction of a forest plan begins with identifying the major issues, concerns, and opportunities affecting management of the particular national forest. The entire process hinges on this important step. On the Hoosier, we identified public issues through a variety of means and refined these over the first months of the process. The Forest kept the public informed and involved to broaden the information base upon which we made decisions and ensure we understood the public's needs, concerns, and values. Public involvement also provided us an opportunity to keep the public informed and answer questions about the process. The Forest Plan is a product that reflects a compromise of opinions on how best to manage the Hoosier based on public insight and involvement.

### Public Involvement and Identification of Issues

Forest issues have evolved over time. Our starting point was the issues that drove the development of the 1991 significant amendment to the Forest Plan. We are not recounting the development of those issues, as that document included a history of the issues to that time. Many of these issues continue to be at the forefront of people's concerns. In the process of amending this Forest Plan, the Forest has addressed some of those issues and put them to rest. The Forest has amended that 1991 Forest Plan seven times, the latest amendment in July 2003.

There are several key points in time for public notification and involvement in the Hoosier's plan revision process:

- Validating the need for change and proposing the scope of revising the Forest Plan
- Commenting on the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan and refining the scope of the issues to be addressed
- Developing alternatives for management
- Reviewing and commenting on the Proposed Forest Plan and Draft EIS, as well as identifying additional information needs and options to be considered
- Participating in implementation of the selected alternative

### General Strategy

The goals of the public involvement strategy for revising the Forest Plan were:

- Develop a revised forest plan that can be implemented
- Develop, maintain, and enhance relationships

The objectives for revising the Plan were to:

- Build informed consent for what will be considered in plan revision and what has already been decided

- Provide multiple ways for interested publics to be involved in the plan revision process
- Establish and maintain two-way communication with interested publics
- Ensure employees have the opportunity to become and stay well informed about revision issues and revision process
- Communicate information in a timely and understandable manner
- Establish and maintain credibility and understanding of the agency and planning process

To provide information to interested parties, the Hoosier used various media, including the internet, newsletters, press releases, public meetings, and focus meetings.

## **Validating the Need for Change**

Since the 1991 Forest Plan Amendment, several national strategic issues have had repercussions at the Forest level. There have also been regional concerns and issues such as management of habitat for Indiana bat, as well as local issues involving concerns such as the appropriateness of salvage after a tornado.

To set the stage for plan revision, we developed a list of issues and concerns based on a review of the issues in the 1991 Forest Plan Amendment, monitoring and evaluation results, lawsuits and appeal issues and decisions, freedom of information requests and issues, changes in public demands or land conditions, new scientific information, and the USDA Forest Service Government Performance and Results Act Strategic Plan (2000). The review indicated most current issues still fit under the umbrella of those developed for the 1991 Forest Plan Amendment.

We did, however, find some areas that potentially needed to be changed and could be addressed in plan revision. We sent a mailing summarizing the five areas to nearly 7,000 people in August 1999. The five areas identified for change were:

- Role of the Hoosier National Forest
- Watershed Health and Restoration
- Timber Harvesting/Vegetation Management
- Prescribed Fire
- Trails

The Hoosier held two open houses in September of 1999, one in Bedford, Indiana and one in Jasper, Indiana to further collect input on these issues and topics for plan revision. In November 1999, two focus group meetings on the role of the Forest were held, one in Martinsville, Indiana and one in Corydon, Indiana. The Forest held a trail group meeting in Bedford in December 1999, and a need for change meeting in French Lick, Indiana in September 2000. All of these meetings provided us with input concerning the need for change and what the public thought a revised forest plan should contain.

The issue of prescribed fire received no comments after the first mailing or at the open houses or public meetings, so we dropped this topic as a major issue in further discussions of need for change.

The Need for Change document, which evolved largely from input from these meetings and responses, proposed changing the Forest goals and focusing on six major revision topics or

issues. The Hoosier incorporated those issues into the Notice of Intent (NOI). The Need for Change also identified a series of topics and issues that we identified as adequately addressed in the 1991 Forest Plan Amendment. The 1991 Forest Plan direction concerning these topics remained with only minor modification.

The Forest mailed the draft Need for Change document and a request for comment to 6,587 people on July 27, 2000. The Forest received several hundred comments, but most comments were similar to those received earlier, and only minor modifications were made to the final Need for Change document. Most of the comments submitted applied more to suggestions for changing the plan, and the Hoosier used them later in the plan revision process.

## **Commenting on the Notice of Intent**

The Federal Register published the NOI to prepare an EIS for Forest Plan revision on November 1, 2000, and the Forest mailed 858 copies of the NOI to interested parties. The NOI was subtitled "Description of Proposal for Revising the Forest Plan of the Hoosier National Forest." The NOI identified six topics:

- Watershed Health
- Ecosystem Sustainability
- Recreation Management
- Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation
- Recommendations concerning Wild and Scenic and Recreational Rivers
- Scenery Management

As part of the public involvement process, the Hoosier held public meetings to receive comment on the NOI and to provide additional explanation of the forest planning process. The Forest held meetings in Martinsville on December 4, 2000 and in Corydon on December 6, 2000. A stenographer was on hand to record oral comments at both meetings. The Forest used the 115 written comments and 54 oral comments to refine the issues.

## **Ongoing Public Updates prior to Draft EIS**

The *Hoosier Quarterly*, or Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions, included regular updates on the plan revision process. The Hoosier sent this newsletter to approximately 350 people per month, posted it on the website, sent it to Indiana Congressional offices, and made copies available in our reception areas for the public.

In February 2000, the *Quarterly* included a full-page write-up on how to access the Forest website for information on Plan revision and projects and how the two types of information differed. In July 2004, the *Hoosier Quarterly* converted to a new format based on a national database. The information, now called *Hoosier Schedule of Proposed Actions*, still includes an update on the status of plan revision and is displayed on the Hoosier website and otherwise available to the public.

The Forest posted all mailings to the public involving plan revision, invitation to comment, or attend open houses or meetings on the Hoosier website. After each meeting, we also posted copies of every handout distributed, any presentation given, and if appropriate, forms to provide comment. If maps or documents were too cumbersome to post to the website, we provided information on how to receive copies.

We provided, as requested, planning updates and information to other groups as well. For example, on December 15, 2000, the Forest Supervisor provided an update to the Indiana Forest Stewardship Coordinating Committee. Twenty-three people attended the meeting. An employee presented an update to the Indiana Chapter of The Society of American Foresters at a membership meeting shortly after the NOI was published.

The Indiana Land Resources Council sponsored a conference called "Gaining Ground: Exploring Land Use Solutions" on October 23-24, 2001, in Indianapolis, Indiana. Over 200 professional land managers from across the State attended the conference. The Forest sponsored a display at the evening reception on forest plan revision and entertained questions, distributed copies of the NOI, and encouraged people to get involved in the process.

A wildlife biologist gave updates to the Indiana Karst Conservancy group on January 10, May 3, July 24, and December 2, 2004. Attendance at each of these meetings ranged from 7 to 15. We provided regular updates on the status of plan revision to other civic and regional groups, such as Historic Southern Indiana, and professional organizations on which Forest employees serve as board members.

## **Public Involvement for Draft EIS and Proposed Plan**

The notice announcing the availability of the Hoosier Plan revision documents appeared in the Federal Register on March 25, 2005. This issue also set the dates for the public comment period, but those dates were amended in the March 27, 2005 Federal Register to have the public comment period close on June 27, 2005.

We mailed the complete set of documents to 35 Federal, State or local agencies, and 120 individuals or organizations. Forty-eight libraries received a complete set of documents, as well, including the Draft EIS, Proposed Forest Plan, DEIS Summary, Map Packet, and a compact disc (CD) of the documents. We mailed 225 copies of the DEIS Summary to individuals who had requested it plus 66 copies of the CD. We also mailed 46 media packets to members of the media and made personal contacts with many of the reporters and producers at the media outlets. The original mailings of these documents were completed on March 14 and 15, 2005. Over the course of the comment period and at public meetings, many more copies of the documents in all formats were distributed.

The goals of public involvement with the release of the draft documents were to encourage and facilitate participation of the public, especially key stakeholders; develop a final plan that could be implemented; and develop, maintain, and enhance relationships.

The Forest presented the completed Proposed Plan and DEIS to Forest employees on February 22 and 25, 2005. The purpose of the meeting was to provide information and clarification on what was contained in the documents.

The Forest held three open houses and public presentations for the public. At each meeting the Forest staff presented a briefing of what was different from the 1991 amendment and what the differences were between alternatives. Questions were answered; several items were clarified, and how to provide substantive comments was stressed. The first of the three meetings was in Martinsville at the Morgan County Fairgrounds on May 10, 2005, and approximately 43 people attended. Thirty-two people attended the second meeting on May 11, 2005, held at the Orange County Fairgrounds in Paoli, Indiana. Forty-three people attended the third meeting at the

Fulton Hill Community Center in Troy, Indiana. Groups represented at the meetings included Monroe County 4x4, Fatboys (a 4 wheel drive group), IFWDA (Indiana Four Wheel Drive Association), the Ruffed Grouse Society, Hoosier Environmental Council, Heartwood, Backcountry Horseman Associations, Tree of Life Alliance, Midwest Trail Riders, Protect Our Woods, and Indiana Audubon Society. Many people did not claim an affiliation with any group.

As requests came in, the Forest staff was available to give presentations on the forest plan revision process and encouraged public participation. The planning team gave a presentation at Purdue University on April 28, 2005 to faculty, students, and interested individuals. Approximately 40 people attended. The Forest Planner gave a presentation to the Bedford Kiwanis Club on April 27 to approximately 15 people. A Forest Wildlife Biologist gave two presentations to Manchester College on plan revision and the Indiana bat to about 30 people each time, and one presentation to the Evansville Audubon Society on the same topic to about 20 people. These presentations were all in May 2005.

A symposium co-sponsored by several natural resources partners including the Society of American Foresters and the Indiana Chapter of The Wildlife Society held on March 3-5, 2005 had two presenters from the Hoosier. The Forest Supervisor spoke about trends in forest and wildlife issues and mentioned the plan revision process. A Hoosier Wildlife Biologist and a North Central Research Station scientist each spoke on endangered species and species of concern and discussed the use of the LANDIS and Habitat Suitability Index models in the Hoosier plan revision for managing wildlife habitat. About 100 people attended each session at the symposium.

Several articles in the newspapers, radio commentaries, and letters to the editor during the public comment period kept the issues and plan revision process in front of the public. Newsletters for a variety of natural resource organizations in Indiana also had short articles encouraging their membership to participate and review the proposed documents.

Other presentations made on revision of the Hoosier Forest Plan included the Forest Supervisor speaking to a local chapter of about 45 members of the Military Officers Association of America about general Hoosier information but also discussed the revision and public involvement on February 4, 2005. The Forest Supervisor and Public Affairs Officer met with six representatives from environmental groups on March 8, 2005 to discuss the plan revision. Forest staff also presented a briefing to The Nature Conservancy on March 23, 2005.

On October 18, 2005, the Forest Supervisor made a presentation and served on a panel at the Indiana Wood Summit on "Outlook for Forestry in Indiana" to a group of 85 people including representatives from industry, academia, state government, and various organizations. In this presentation he discussed the Hoosier plan revision, forest resources, and public comments.

## **Consultation within the Forest Service**

The Hoosier has worked closely with the Eastern Regional Office of the Forest Service. The Regional Forester is the Responsible Official for the Forest Plan, so the Forest staff worked closely with the Regional Office staff at several key points in the process to ensure their involvement. We integrated Regional expertise into the plan and used models they suggested from other national forests in the Eastern Region as we developed the analysis for the Hoosier.

The Hoosier also worked closely with the Shawnee National Forest in Illinois as the two Forests worked on parallel tracks to revise their forest plans. Meetings between the two Forests allowed the planning teams to collaborate on some areas of analysis and share ideas and successes.

Scientists from the Forest Service's North Central Research Station worked with the Forest to create Geographic Information System (GIS)-based habitat suitability models for the species viability evaluation (SVE) species. Appendix H has more information on this effort, but these Forest Service scientists were a key part of the analysis for the plan revision.

## **Consultation with Other Government Agencies**

The Forest held a State and Federal interagency meeting specifically about plan revision in Indianapolis on December 17, 1999, to gather input from other government agencies. This meeting allowed agencies to share information and help the Hoosier get started with early analysis. Thirty-one people representing 17 agencies or divisions were invited.

Once the documents were published, meetings with both Federal and key State legislators were scheduled from February 10 through April 15, 2005 as Forest staff made visits to brief the groups and discuss the planning documents with individuals in attendance. The Mayors of Bedford and Tell City were also briefed on the contents of the documents.

A meeting for all State and other Federal agencies on April 15, 2005 was held in Indianapolis. At this meeting, Forest staff explained changes to the proposed planning documents and encouraged the other agencies to comment and work with the Forest. Thirty-five agencies, divisions, or departments were invited.

Another presentation was to the State Technical Committee on June 14, 2005 by the Public Affairs Officer. Twenty-four people representing several State and Federal management agencies, agricultural organizations, and universities were present.

The USDI Bureau of Land Management provided a geologist to work with each national forest to coordinate any minerals-related issues during plan revision. In a July 19, 2002 letter Dave Lachance, geologist with the Milwaukee Office of the Bureau, was assigned as the point of contact for the Hoosier. Later that responsibility was shifted to Lucille Tamm, also of the Milwaukee office. She provided the analysis for the minerals portion of the DEIS and worked closely with the Forest as we made revisions for the FEIS.

Forest personnel met with Andrew King and Scott Pruitt from the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service on May 21, 2004 to update them on the preferred alternative and discuss the formal consultation process.

A wildlife biologist also attended a meeting with the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) Division of Fish and Wildlife in the spring of 2004 to discuss alternatives and modeling for species habitat and showed them prospective management area maps. About 25 people attended this meeting.

The Hoosier has kept county, State, and other governmental agencies apprised of the status of Forest Plan revision and consulted on common management concerns. We consulted on Forest Plan revision during regularly scheduled briefings.

## Developing Alternatives

The Forest held public meetings prior to developing alternatives for managing the Hoosier. At these meetings, we provided the public with an overview of the process to date, a discussion of analysis in progress, and what they could expect to see in the future. During the meetings, we divided members of the public into groups to provide the planning team with input concerning three conceptual alternatives. To provide direction to the groups, we suggested they develop alternatives that would present their ideas relative to alternatives that would have minimum impacts on forest resources, would maximize resource use, or would approach some middle ground. In addition to the two meetings for the public, the Forest held a similar session for Forest employees on July 21, 2003 in Bedford, Indiana. The two meetings held for members of the public were at Jasper, Indiana on August 2, 2003 and in Bedford, Indiana on August 16, 2003.

During the public meetings, we asked participants what to change or keep in the 1985 Plan as amended. We also sought input from attendees concerning the desired level of various land uses and forest products. We asked the public to help us map management areas for various management strategies; the groups, however, generally provided only narrative comments on philosophies of management and activities they wished or did not wish to see on the Hoosier. One of the prevalent messages we heard at the meetings was that people were generally happy with the current management of the Forest.

The Planning Team used these comments from the public, other agencies, and Hoosier employees to develop five alternatives for managing the resources on NFS lands. One of these alternatives reflects the “no action alternative” or the current management strategy under the 1985 Forest Plan as amended. To ensure that all comments were included, planning documents in the record provide a crosswalk for each of the comments we received from the public and show which alternative carried the comment forward. Chapter 2 describes the resulting alternatives.

In addition, earlier in the process, a group calling itself the Indiana Public Lands Coalition had presented an unsolicited alternative. The coalition was composed of 15 organizations. This group drafted what they referred to as the *Conservationist’s Alternative to the Hoosier National Forest Land Management Plan*. This document, dated September 28, 2000, was used as input in developing the alternatives; in general, this alternative closely resembles Alternative 2.

## Sorting and Disposition of Issues

Over the years, many issues regarding the Hoosier have come and gone. By working with the public, the Hoosier has often been able to adequately address a concern so that the issue was defused.

The issues for this Plan revision were selected based on certain criteria. Each represents:

- A subject of widespread interest raised by the public or management
- A subject within the authority of the Forest to address
- A concern that is Forest-wide in scope
- A topic appropriate for the Forest to address in this planning process

Early scoping, as well as the NOI, listed six issue topics. Although we understood that the topics would vary in importance to the public, we believed, based on early discussions, that each would merit some discussion. To that end, we grouped all subsequent comments under the six issues or topics. However, since that time all public input has not fit in those categories, and the amount of input in the six categories has certainly not been equal. Nonetheless, grouping comments and issues in this way has helped us better understand public input and better compare and contrast comments.

Some individual concerns conflict with one another, and it would be impossible to address and provide for every need the public requests. In many cases, meeting one concern affects our ability to meet someone else's concern. Tradeoffs become necessary. We have not editorialized as to the accuracy of the representative comments presented here. Some comments are based on incorrect information. For further information and background on the development of these issues, the planning records are on file at the Hoosier National Forest office in Bedford.

Of those comments that do not fit under the umbrella of these six topics, some are beyond the jurisdiction of the Forest Service, outside the scope of the planning process, or best handled on a case-by-case basis in site-specific evaluations. We grouped comments within the scope of the planning process by issue area. Surrounding each of these issues, there may be conflicting values about management of the forest and the outcomes desired of forest management.

The first three issues identified in the NOI--Watershed Health, Ecosystem Sustainability, and Recreation Management--each received considerable input and discussion. These issues were obviously the primary issues of importance to the public and to other agencies and even our own employees.

The issue regarding recommendations concerning Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers was primarily an internal topic even in 1991. At that time, the Forest Service determined the eligibility and potential classification of the Little Blue River and Lost River. The 1991 Forest Plan found the rivers eligible for classification and provided full protection of the values for which the rivers were eligible. During this planning period, the Forest received few comments concerning Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers in response to the NOI and other scoping. Scattered land ownership also complicates the ability to designate the identified rivers as Wild and Scenic. Following consideration and analysis, it was decided to continue to maintain the rivers in a manner that provides protection to the values that might one day allow them to be designated Wild and Scenic. A further discussion of the Wild and Scenic River issue is in Appendix F.

The issue of scenery management began as an internal issue when our Regional Office indicated the need to reevaluate the scenery management system prior to initial scoping for Forest Plan revision. Both monitoring and public comments indicated no concerns or need to change the current process of managing for visual quality. The internal requirement to change systems for managing visual resources has been withdrawn, so the existing Visual Quality Objectives (VQO) system will be maintained through the next planning period.

Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation is required for consideration by regulation (36 CFR 219.17). Direction states that roadless areas should be evaluated and considered for recommendation as potential wilderness areas (36 CFR 219.17(a)).

In 1978, the Secretary of Agriculture listed three roadless areas in the Forest: Grubb Ridge, Cope Hollow, and Mogan Ridge. Two of those areas were later included in the Hoosier's only designated Wilderness area. In 1982, Congress designated the Charles C. Deam Wilderness in two units separated by the Tower Ridge Road. Cope Hollow is the southern unit of the Wilderness, and Grubb Ridge and Terrill Ridge comprise the northern unit.

Roadless Area Conservation was politically in the news in 1999 and 2000, as rules were made governing how these areas are managed nationally. The national proposed rule change and environmental study for managing 54 million acres of roadless areas overlapped the Hoosier's plan revision process. The Hoosier held two meetings to gather input on the national rule change as well as the impact the participants felt the roadless rules had on the Hoosier planning effort. Meetings were held on December 9, 1999 in Martinsville, Indiana and Troy, Indiana. We provided participants an information package and a speaker's card if they wished to provide oral comments. The Martinsville meeting had 34 attendees, 22 of whom spoke. The Troy meeting had 43 attendees, 12 of whom provided oral comments.

The Hoosier followed up in May 2000 with two meetings, held at Martinsville and Troy, Indiana, as part of the public rule-making process for the national roadless areas. The Forest conducted the meetings to gather feedback on the proposed rules and draft EIS. The Martinsville meeting, held on May 22, 2000, was attended by 38 people. Approximately half those who attended felt the rules had not gone far enough; the other half seemed to think they had gone too far. The Troy meeting was held on May 23, 2000 and was attended by 11 people. Most attendees were concerned about access and how the national roadless rules would affect current management of the Mogan Ridge area.

Another series of meetings were held in Martinsville and Troy on June 27 and 28, 2000, respectfully. The Forest held these meetings to gather comments on the final national policy. A court reporter attended both meetings to officially transcribe all comments and submit as official comments. The Martinsville meeting was attended by 45 people, of which 32 made oral comments. The majority of these believed the final decision should have preserved more acreage in roadless areas. The Troy meeting was attended by 16 people, of which only three made oral comments. This meeting was more informal, and the group was more interested in general questions about the Hoosier.

During 2002 and 2003, the Hoosier conducted an analysis of areas considered as potentially suited for roadless. Appendix D documents this analysis. Prior to presenting the analysis to the public, the planning team presented the analysis and asked employees to evaluate the possible roadless areas. Twenty-eight employees attended the workshop and provided comments.

The Forest held a public workshop on June 29, 2002 in French Lick, Indiana to review the inventory of roadless areas on the Hoosier and determine if any of the areas qualified. Invitations were sent to 1,024 individuals or groups inviting them to this meeting. We also placed public notices in the Hoosier Times (Bloomington) newspaper and Perry County News, and mailed news releases to media outlets. Twenty-one people attended the workshops. The workshops began with an update on the plan revision process and the roadless inventory process. We then discussed each area with maps and criteria and asked the participants to evaluate each of 14 areas to determine which, if any, might qualify for roadless designation. Those present filled out an evaluation form with criteria for designation for each area. Participants worked in small groups and as individuals to evaluate the 14 areas.

Additionally, the Forest took individuals from Hoosier Environmental Council on a field trip to visit some of the roadless areas and further examine their eligibility on July 24, 2002.

The Forest Supervisor signed a letter on December 31, 2002, which was mailed to 971 people concerning the results of the roadless area inventory. This letter announced the decision that none of the 14 areas met the criteria for roadless areas. The Forest only received two comments from this mailing. None of the comments received disagreed with the findings.

## **Issues Addressed**

Chapter 1 presents information on the issues and how we will measure each alternative's response to those issues. The following narrative highlights each issue, as well as a representation of the type of comments that we received for each. These comments were all in response to the NOI and are only a few of the many comments received on each issue. This provides readers a taste of the diversity of comments on these issues. Planning records are available for review of individual comments.

### **Issue One - Watershed Health**

The Hoosier provides watershed protection in an area that includes private forests, small farms with pastures and cultivated fields, rural homes and developments, and small communities. Private land dominates the landscape. Water quality is important to many activities in this area. Agricultural and residential uses suffer if there is not an abundance of good quality water.

Forests provide protection to the watershed by reducing erosion and sedimentation. Roads and trails are located to minimize impacts to riparian areas and stream and river crossings. The Hoosier actively works to restore wetland complexes along our river systems to restore the important dynamics of wetlands and marshes that once flanked most of the rivers in southern Indiana,

The former Plan emphasized conservation, maintenance, and restoration of plant and animal communities to enhance biological diversity. This remains important, but this framework did not separate the concept of watershed health. Protecting watersheds is historically the primary purpose of the Hoosier National Forest per the Weeks Act of 1911, which enabled the purchase of lands in the eastern United States.

Typically, people do not take different positions on this issue. Everyone we heard from was in favor of healthy watersheds. Conflicts arise between this use of land (watershed protection) and other uses, such as recreation and vegetation management. Our challenge is to continue to provide other goods and services while ensuring that water quality and functioning watersheds are protected.

An example of input related to this issue was a letter that identified impaired waters on or adjacent to the Hoosier. It indicated that those waters were impaired not by sediment, such as could be generated by forest management practices, but rather by PCBs, mercury, *E. coli* bacteria, and priority organics. Such impairments are a concern to the Hoosier but may be outside the scope of our ability to influence in plan revision.

These are among the comments that we have received and considered in developing alternatives:

- Be aware of the Total Maximum Daily Loads and the impairment of waters on and adjacent to the Hoosier.
- Consider the evidence that logging harms watersheds.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to establish a “reference” watershed on the Hoosier; it could be compared with other watersheds with varying degrees of disturbance.
- Coordinate with the appropriate state and local agencies to ensure protection of water quality and maintenance of beneficial uses.
- Include information on the potential for the alternatives to cause adverse impacts such as increased siltation and turbidity, dissolved oxygen, temperature, and habitat deterioration. Outline past and potential beneficial uses of these areas and disclose potential impacts from the proposed alternatives
- Identify impacts to water, floodplains, and wetlands.
- Provide a strong watershed protection plan.
- Continue to keep watershed protection as a high priority and to perform ecological assessments.
- Identify impacts to water, floodplains, and wetlands, including identification of Section 404 Clean Water Act requirements and proposals to ensure compliance with these requirements.

## **Issue Two - Ecosystem Sustainability**

Growing populations and changing forest uses are placing increased demands on forest ecosystems. People have asked a variety of questions regarding how natural communities should be distributed on the Forest and what level and type of management is appropriate.

The amount of timber harvested on the forest is of interest to many groups. Preservationists would like to eliminate timber management on the Hoosier. Others do not object to timber harvests in theory but want only those techniques used which have minimal visual impacts. Hunters, many conservationists, and the timber industry support timber harvesting as a critical tool to ensure biological diversity. Their interests include viable populations of early successional species, timber products, and high-quality veneer trees.

The Hoosier and Shawnee National Forests collaborated on an ecological assessment. The ecological assessment, species viability evaluations, ecological land type phase analysis, and GIS provide important tools for analyzing risks to these resources and ensuring that the resources are protected. These new tools that were not available in 1991 will help us better understand a variety of ecological relationships and species needs and habitat.

To formalize our commitment to the conservation of biological diversity, we have added or modified three major Plan goals. They are: 1) Conservation of Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat, 2) Maintain and Restore Watershed Health, and 3) Maintain and Restore Sustainable Ecosystems.

Methods of managing vegetation, the desired mix of Forest habitats, and how and why the forest is valuable to people are all subjects that generate concern. Our challenge is to provide an acceptable balance.

Two main sub-issues related to ecosystem sustainability are maintaining viable populations of species and managing vegetation.

These are among the comments that we have received:

- Ban logging.
- Prohibit commercial mining on the Hoosier.
- Continue controlled logging because it does not harm the forest.
- Discontinue commercial logging. Limit annual timber harvest to only enough to keep the forest healthy.
- Continue prescribed burning and clearcutting or develop more proactive vegetation management, through prescribed burning and timber harvest than the plan presently prescribes.
- Avoid timber harvesting that costs the taxpayers.
- Discontinue the forest openings program to: provide habitat for climax species; avoid harm to deep forest species; cease increasing the numbers of deer, which eat all the plants up; and prevent forest fragmentation.
- Monitor sensitive species.
- Manage for species currently living in the Hoosier.
- Consider the number of species that have become extinct in the past, extinction being a natural process.
- Complement the focus on population viability with an ecosystem approach that emphasizes ecosystem integrity.
- Focus on long-term management of the ecosystem and species viability versus a species-specific approach.
- Emphasize native plant and animal species and communities by avoiding planting of domesticated plant species and preventing introduction of exotic plant and animal species.
- Adopt a management plan which emphasizes an eco-friendly, low-impact approach, such as the “Conservationist Alternative” of the Indiana Public Lands Coalition.
- Avoid planting of domesticated plant species and prevent introduction of exotic plant and animal species.
- Consider climate change.
- Describe the current and proposed land management activities including prescribed burning and road construction and their impact on air quality. Describe air quality standards, ambient conditions, and potential air quality impacts for the Hoosier.
- Analyze the cumulative effects on wildlife habitat and wetlands especially in relation to the expected land use changes (such as timber harvesting).
- Continue the many positive aspects of the plan.
- In your analysis of historical and current vegetative condition across the landscape, consider the loss of natural disturbances that historically set back succession on a frequent basis and accommodate the need to replace those disturbances with human-caused phenomena.

- Consider the need of prairie warbler, Bewicks wren, whip-poor-will, worm-eating warbler, ruffed grouse, and other species for forest clearing interspersed and early and middle successional conditions on the Forest.

## **Issue Three - Recreation Management**

Public land in Indiana is at a premium. Indiana ranks near the bottom of the 50 states in the percent of public land available. With only four percent of the Indiana land base in public ownership and a high population density, there is high demand for the limited supply of outdoor recreation opportunities. As the only national forest in Indiana, the Hoosier serves several special needs in this environment. The recreational niche of the Hoosier is to provide backcountry opportunities, unrestricted primitive recreation, mountain biking, horse riding, wilderness experiences, hunting opportunities, and developed water-based recreation.

Large blocks of contiguous public land are uncommon in Indiana. The Hoosier is an exception, providing several 1,000+-acre areas for backcountry experiences. Such blocks provide solitude and opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, and gathering forest products. They also provide long-distance trails used by horse riders, mountain bikers, and hikers.

The Hoosier provides trails for mountain biking. Indiana also ranks high in equestrian use. The Forest and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources are the only two major providers of these opportunities, and they complement each other by providing trails and horse camps at strategic locations in southern Indiana.

Water-based recreation is at a premium due to the lack of natural lakes. Human-made lakes are extremely popular, and recreation facilities located on them are in high demand. The national forest's premier developed recreation facilities are located on reservoirs and provide swimming, boating, fishing, and camping opportunities.

The rest of the national forest provides additional outdoor recreational opportunities, including camping, hunting, and the gathering of forest products, activities that are highly restricted or prohibited on other public lands in Indiana. For example, there are few other places in Indiana where one may legally pull off to the side of the road and set up camp on public land.

Tourism is an important industry in southern Indiana. NFS lands provide the scenic backdrop for driving tours such as those promoted by Historic Southern Indiana. Our campgrounds, swimming beaches, fishing lakes, multi-use trails, watchable wildlife sites, scenic overlooks, scenic cliffs, and boat ramps are featured in tourist visitor guides.

Our challenge is to provide a balanced combination of recreation environments so that all forest users can select the type of environment that best fits their needs. Two major issues under recreation revolve around off-highway vehicle use and multiple-use trails.

### **Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) Use**

Under the former Forest Plan, OHV use is prohibited on the Hoosier. This issue has generated a great deal of interest and controversy. Conflict exists between people who feel that off-highway vehicle use is a legitimate use of Forest land and those who do not. Many people see the Hoosier as the only opportunity for long-distance OHV trail riding in Indiana.

This issue was addressed in an amendment to the 1985 Plan. The decision was made, subsequently appealed, and upheld by the Chief of the Forest Service that there would be no off-road vehicle use areas on the Hoosier for the planning period that has now expired. This issue was to be re-examined during the present planning process, and at various times the issue received strong interest, and at other times little or no interest. There were more comments received on the NOI regarding the use of OHVs on the Forest (both pro and con) than comments on all other issues combined.

The Hoosier has contacted national OHV groups and other NFS units concerning the subject of ATV trails. Chapter 3 includes a discussion on the analysis of OHV use on the Forest.

These are among the many comments received:

- Maintain the ban on ATVs and OHVs due to the noise, disruption of solitude and relaxation, widened trails, exhaust fumes, damage and scarring of the forest floor, destruction of plant life, disturbance of wildlife, soil erosion, compaction, and stream pollution.
- Keep OHVs out of the Hoosier because the vehicles pose dangers to other trail users.
- Maintain the ban on OHVs because of the expense to the Forest in repairing damage caused by OHVs.
- Maintain the ban because the Forest does not have the ability to enforce permitted access.
- Maintain the ban on OHVs to save the forest for future generations.
- Maintain the ban on OHVs because they are incompatible with public land recreation.
- Maintain the ban because OHV users' requests are not realistic and are contrary to the goals of the forest.
- Prohibit an OHV trail system because the Hoosier is too fragmented to allow adequate buffers.
- Keep OHVs out because OHV use would have negative impacts on adjacent rural landowners.
- Add a forest goal: "Recreation by user groups should not ruin the recreation experience of anyone else."
- Prohibit OHVs because that type of recreation frequently results in pioneered trails, which yield losses of soil, vegetation, and water quality, as well as disturbances to wildlife.
- End the ban on OHVs because it is not right for the public to be banned from using public land paid for by taxes.
- Lift the ban to allow only four-cycle motors and original muffler system spark arrestors that are within set noise limits.
- Allow OHV use in the Hoosier because it would economically benefit Indiana to have the users spend money here instead of in other states.
- Lift the ban because it is an opportunity for people to enjoy nature.
- Allow OHVs in the Hoosier so that users may have access to a managed trail system.
- Open a portion of the Hoosier to OHV riding since OHV use promotes family bonding and helps children develop good ethics and values.
- Create pilot areas to determine if OHVs are compatible.
- Follow the example of some other national forests and provide for OHV and four-wheel

drive use and the economic benefits they provide.

- Allow OHV use of clearcut areas.
- Rotate OHV trails to minimize impacts and provide sanctuary to watersheds.
- Leave a 2,000-acre buffer around OHV area to protect landowners from possible noise and trespass.
- Link trails with county roads to provide long loops for OHV riders.
- Curtail illegal OHV use by providing legal areas for people to ride.
- Instead of closing roads, keep them open for recreational four-wheel drive use.
- Allow four-wheel drive access on the Hoosier because of the large demand for this activity.

### Issues Concerning Horse, Hike, and Mountain Bike Trails

The 1994 Plan amendment included setting trail density limits by management area, setting access policy for adjacent landowners and special-use trails, and requiring both horse use and mountain bike use to be on designated trails. The Hoosier prepared an environmental assessment and solicited extensive public involvement in preparing the amendment. Since the 1994 plan amendment, the Hoosier has invested over \$1,600,000 in trail improvements.

After reviewing later comments on the trail issue, we saw a need to review our trail maintenance practices. Responses from the August 30, 1999 mailing, public meetings held in the fall of 1999 and personal contacts indicated concerns with trail maintenance practices such as trail hardening with gravel. The Forest will address these issues outside of plan revision, as they are not strategic plan issues but operational issues. The Hoosier is also working on techniques to measure trail use and monitor trail conditions and wants to work with user groups to meet their desires while protecting the resources. For example, the Hoosier hosted an International Mountain Bike Association trail management workshop in May 1999 to become more aware of trail maintenance practices that are compatible with mountain bike use. Forest staff has attended many other conferences, such as the Southeast Equestrian Trails Conference and National Trails Symposium. Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University completed a study of the impacts from horses on trails.

We held three public workshops in the fall (October 7 and 14, and November 4) of 2000 to involve the public in a field review of our trails and to have a symposium using experts from other areas and agencies. After those workshops, we reviewed what we learned.

People are interested in trail management. Many comments support multi-use trails, but other comments support single-use trails. Some comments oppose the use of gravel, but some support gravel.

These are among the comments received:

- Close trails during wet season.
- Increase trail system, to alleviate overuse of trails.
- Develop more horse trails.
- Develop more hiking trails.
- Develop short family-type trails.

- Make trails accessible by handicapped persons.
- Build trails to withstand all types of use, including OHV.
- Charge fees for high impact use since these areas may never recover.
- Charge fee to users of single-use trails.
- Charge fees for all uses to maintain trails.
- Don't close trails or ensure public involvement before closing a trail.
- Provide an inexpensive hiking map and use that to tally the number of hikers.
- Offer guided tours of special areas on the Forest like the karst features.
- Provide short trail loops for handicapped riders and accessible trails in the Wilderness.
- Don't use gravel in the Wilderness.
- Provide more trails in the Wilderness.

## **Public Comments Received**

During the 3-month public comment period, we received approximately 1,550 letters. Of those, around 100 contained substantive comments. These letters were from individuals, groups, and agencies. No elected officials commented on the planning documents.

Commenters raised many concerns. Appendix J includes comments and responses to them.