

**Western Montana Planning Zone  
Analysis of the Management Situation  
Draft Version 1**

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

### **Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests**

The Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests are beginning a joint effort to revise their Forest Plans. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976 requires that National Forest Land and Resource Management Plans (referred to as "forest plans") be revised whenever conditions or demands have significantly changed, or at least every 15 years.

The 1982 NFMA planning regulations (36 CFR 219) require that an Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) be prepared as one of the first steps to initiate a forest plan revision. The AMS will develop a reference framework of information about the conditions of the land and peoples' uses of it so that a range of options for the future can be constructed to address public needs and issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities. To meet the needs of revising forest plans the AMS will focus on where and why we think there is a need to change the current plans. It paints a picture of the current biological, physical and social setting. It helps define the decision space and it provides the foundation for developing a range of alternatives for consideration.

#### ***Purpose of the Analysis of the Management Situation***

This AMS will:

1. Provide a clear explanation of the management situation including an overview of conditions and trends, land capabilities, monitoring and evaluation findings and applicable guidance from broader-scale assessments and conservation strategies.
2. Describe the "no action" alternative (implications of continuing with current forest plan direction).
3. Identify the Need for Change that will lead to a proposed action.
4. Define the decision space available to the decision maker and provide a basis for expectations about scope of revision.
5. Provide a foundation for developing a proposed action that, through public scoping, will lead to issue development.

This is not a decision document. Rather, it provides a synthesis of information useful for developing alternative ways to manage the three national forests.

### **Three Forests – One Revision**

The Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo National Forests have teamed up to revise their Forest Plans. There are several reasons for this approach:

- The timing for revision of the three forest plans is similar. The current forest plans were approved on:

Flathead National Forest	January 22, 1986
Lolo National Forest	April 8, 1986
Bitterroot National Forest	September 30, 1987

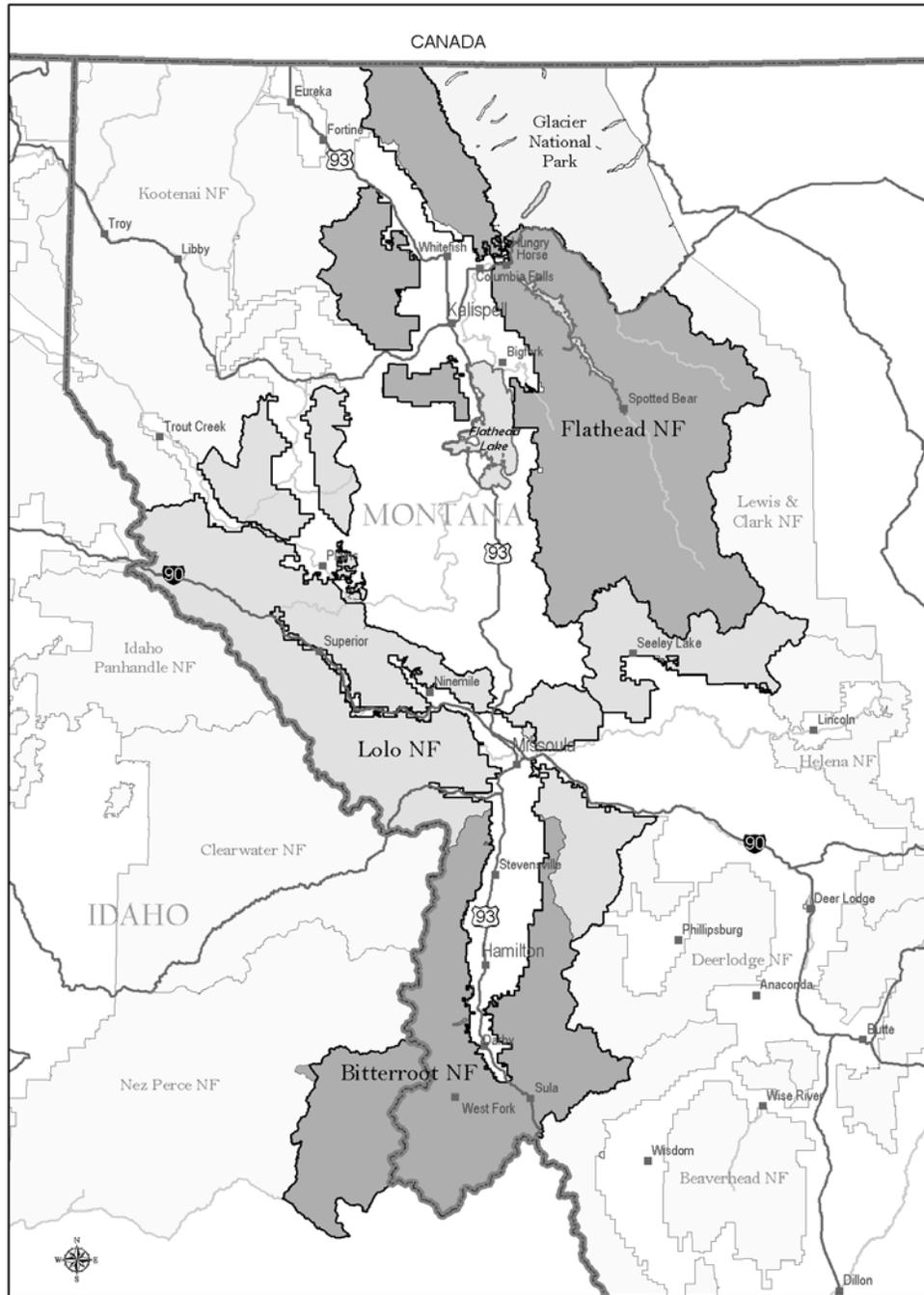
- The three forests share key issues, resources, customers, and interested publics.
- Assessments and management strategies for several key issues need to consider a larger geographical area than a single national forest.
- By working together and sharing personnel, services, budget, knowledge, and experience, we expect to increase the overall efficiency and quality of the revision effort.
- We will have more consistency between forests where appropriate, but allow for individual variation as needed.

The National Forest Management Act requires that one integrated plan be formulated for each unit of the National Forest System. We propose to produce one Environmental Impact Statement, but three separate revised forest plans. Figure 1 below is a map that shows the extent of the Western Montana Planning Zone, and the three forests and communities within the zone.

### **Timeline for Revision**

Fall of 2003	Complete Draft AMS, Issue Revised Notice of Intent (NOI) and Proposed Action
Winter 2003/2004	Public Scoping on Issues Associated with the Proposed Action
Spring 2004	Identification of Significant Issues and Development of Preliminary Alternatives
Winter 2004/2005	Release of Draft EIS and Draft Forest Plans
Spring 2005	Public Comment Period on Draft EIS and Plans
Winter 2005/2006	Issue Final EIS, Final Plans and Records of Decision

Figure 1: Vicinity Map of the Western Montana Planning Zone



### ***An Updated View of Forest Planning***

The forest planning of the early 1980s was expensive because it required that each Forest build a plan from scratch. Our revision process will build upon the knowledge base of the current plans, monitoring of projects implemented under those plans, new science and changes in social expectations. One objective is to focus the revision more on the desired condition (DC) of the forest so that people planning future projects have a clear understanding of landscape objectives.

Other principles of forest plan revision include:

- Base plan revision on “need for change”, while validating earlier decisions where no need for change has been documented.
- Better define plan-monitoring items to measure progress in meeting Desired Conditions (DC).
- Emphasize collaborative and vigorous public involvement.
- Continue to actively involve our Federal, State, County, and Tribal partners.
- Use the latest science throughout the planning process.
- Recognize budget limitations in order to help the Responsible Official prioritize and balance competing planning activities.
- Revised Plans are more strategic:
  - ◇ More specific statements of desired conditions developed within the context of ecological, economic, and social systems.
  - ◇ More specific outcome-based objectives (i.e., measurable standards of performance).
  - ◇ Standards that guide activities to help achieve desired conditions.
  - ◇ Standards will be fewer, simpler, and better allow for adaptive management.
  - ◇ Larger management areas that better portray landscape level goals and objectives, and reflect larger scale processes.
  - ◇ Plans will refer to, rather than repeat Forest Service Directives (Manuals and Handbooks), existing law and regulation.

#### ***Six Decisions Made in Forest Plans***

(36 CFR 219.11, 219.17 and 219.25):

1. *Forest Goals and Objectives.*
2. *Forest-wide Standards.*
3. *Management Area Delineation and Management Area Direction.*
4. *Identification of Lands Not Suited For Timber Production.*
5. *Monitoring and Evaluation Requirements.*
6. *Recommendations for Research Natural Areas and Wilderness Designation.*

### ***Determining the Need For Change***

In revising the forest plan, we will focus on those areas that must be reviewed in accordance with federal regulations, and on critical issues identified through new information, monitoring, and public concern. The 1982 regulations mandate this:

*"The Forest Supervisor shall determine the major public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities to be addressed in the planning process" [36 CFR 219.12(b)].*

*"Based on consideration of data and findings developed in paragraphs (e) (1)-(4), a determination of the need to establish or change management direction" [36 CFR 219.12 (e)(5)].*

The Interdisciplinary Team used a broad array of existing information to identify areas of the forest plans most in need of change. Sources of information included:

- **Forest plan annual monitoring reports and 5-year reviews:** National Forests monitor and evaluate land management activities to determine how well objectives have been met and how well standards and guidelines have been applied. The Bitterroot, Flathead and Lolo have completed many Forest-Wide monitoring reports in addition to the comprehensive 5-year reviews listed below.
  - ◇ Bitterroot Forest Plan Five-Year Review, July 1994
  - ◇ Bitterroot Post Fire Plan Review (2001)
  - ◇ Flathead – Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report 1993- 1997, September 1998
  - ◇ Lolo Forest Plan Five-Year Review, April 1993
- **Northern Region Overview:** This assessment, prepared in 1998, explored the Region's situation with regard to ecosystem health and recreation.
- **New scientific information** as it becomes available.
- **Forest Service employees** including District Rangers were interviewed to get their perspectives and learn what they are hearing from individuals, groups and elected officials that they deal with on a daily basis.

### ***Need for Change***

Using the sources listed above, the interdisciplinary team identified six major needs-for-change topics. These topics are complex and controversial enough that they likely would drive alternatives. These topics are described in detail in Chapter 4 of this document.

**Access management:** This topic includes all aspects of motorized and non-motorized travel (including winter travel). Comprehensive management direction is needed to provide for increasing use and resource protection.

**Ecosystem Management:** Multiple use continues to be the cornerstone of National Forest System land management, but our view of how to implement it

has evolved. Ecosystem management principles, in use over the last decade, were not expressed clearly in the current forest plans. Ecosystem management incorporates social, ecological, and economic components. This topic includes vegetation, biodiversity, species viability, and water resources as well as addressing the roles of fire, other natural disturbances, and invasive species.

**Forest Products:** This topic consists of classifying lands as either suited or not suited for timber production, calculating the level of timber harvest associated with suitable timber lands, and identifying the appropriate use of timber harvest as a tool to achieve resource management objectives. Management direction for harvest of miscellaneous forest products such as mushrooms, beargrass, berries, and firewood is also included in this topic.

**National Forest and Private Land Interface Management:** This topic includes all aspects of resource management (fire, fuels, recreation, fish, wildlife, etc.) on lands adjacent to existing and growing urban developments.

**Recreation and Outfitter Guide Management:** Clear consistent direction for recreation and outfitter/guide use is needed that protects resource values, provides flexibility to accommodate changing public demands and provides a quality experience to all visitors.

**Wilderness Recommendations and Roadless Areas:** This topic includes recommendations for future Wilderness areas, and what management direction should apply to those areas and to roadless areas not recommended for wilderness.

In addition, we have identified many other needs for changes which merit substantial consideration but will probably not drive alternatives. That is, the manner in which they are addressed will probably differ very little from one alternative to the next. Appendix A lists some of the more significant of these items. For example, item #21 identifies a need to improve our direction for Heritage Management. This is very important, but we expect the changes to be relatively straightforward and not controversial.

Other Need for Change items will likely surface as we hear from the public during the process. All management direction will be examined and modified as necessary. There are many places where we believe that minor changes in wording or minor additions or deletions are needed. There are hundreds of potential small updates that fall into this category.

### ***Public Involvement***

The purpose of public involvement is to meaningfully engage all interested individuals, groups, agencies and Native American Tribes in our Forest Plan revision process, in the most effective and efficient way we can. We have set the following two major goals to help us do this:

1. To meaningfully and efficiently incorporate the “public voice” in arriving at revised Forest Plans that are useful, implementable, and widely supported.
2. To build a constructive and lasting two-way dialogue between the three revision Forests in the Western Montana Zone, and the people they serve.

Accomplishing these goals will require us to approach public involvement in a number of different ways. First, we must keep our own employees sufficiently involved that they will understand, support, and be confident in their abilities to successfully implement the revised Forest Plans. It is also essential that we maintain the appropriate level of dialogue and exchange of technical information with other agencies and governments whose interests are linked with National Forest Management in the Western Montana Planning Zone. Among the other governments will be the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, Nez Perce, and other potentially affected American Indian Tribes.

The general public, whether or not they are affiliated with any particular organization, location or interest, will be given opportunities to be informed of what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how they can become actively involved if they so choose. We will encourage and support local and national interest groups in initiating constructive dialogues with other interest groups as well as the Forest Service to find realistic and implementable solutions to policy-level conflicts that many believe contribute to gridlock in the management of public forest lands. We also want to engage place-based communities in on-going small group dialogues that will draw on local knowledge, lifestyles, and livelihoods to arrive at recommendations as to how National Forest lands closest to their own communities should be managed.

We expect the place-based component of our public involvement effort to also provide additional social assessment information. It will be a forum for dialogue among “neighbors” who actually live in and near the places (Geographic Areas) that will be directly affected by Forest Plan implementation. The concept of place-based, is discussed more fully in the Geographic Areas description on page 3-7 of this document.

Dialogue will take place in community place-based “groups” that could vary widely in size and type. They could range from back yard gatherings, to rural fire districts, to community civic clubs, to homeowners’ associations, to new groups formed explicitly to address Forest planning issues. Conveners could include individuals, elected leaders, or existing multi-stakeholder groups (such as a Resource Advisory Committee, or a Resource Conservation and Development office). Participation will be open to anyone who has an interest in Forest Planning for a particular Geographic Area, and who is willing to abide by whatever reasonable process ground rules the group decided to adopt. The output of these groups could include:

- Providing place-based input on needs-for-change in current plans.
- Providing input on desired conditions and management alternatives in their Geographic Area.
- Giving feedback on draft materials, such as proposed range of alternatives and Draft EIS.

- Serving as a local sounding board and source of local knowledge, throughout the revision process.
- Conducting community-based monitoring during Forest Plan implementation.

In summary, here are some of the public involvement activities we will undertake:

- Maintain open communication and dialogue with our own employees to keep them informed and to solicit their feedback on major works-in-progress as the revised Plans are developed.
- Provide broad and easily accessible opportunities for informing the public what we are doing, and considering their feedback.
- Engage in place-based dialogue with citizens who live in and around the three revision Forests. Engage in interest-based dialogue with major local, regional, and national stakeholders.
- Coordinate with other governments and agencies to assure that their needs for information and involvement are met, and that our professional and legal obligations to incorporate their interests and expertise are met.

### ***Consultation with American Indian Tribes***

American Indian Tribes are Sovereigns. As such they are government entities with which the Forest Service establishes and maintains a government-to-government relationship. Through treaties, tribes have reserved rights and privileges for their tribal members on the lands ceded to the U.S. Government. The U.S. Forest Service now manages some of the lands ceded in the treaties. These treaties create a legal responsibility by the U.S. Government toward Indian Tribes. This obligates the Forest Service to carry out laws and executive orders enacted for the protection and benefit of federally recognized Indian Tribes. As part of meeting these responsibilities, we are required to consult with tribes whenever our proposed policies or forest management actions may affect their interests. We will meet this obligation in the following ways:

- By establishing formal consultation through face-to-face meetings between our Forest Supervisors, and the Tribal Councils of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai, and the Nez Perce Tribes.
- By continuing staff-to-staff consultations through already existing relationships with these Tribes.
- By responding to requests for involvement by other federally-recognized tribes in whatever appropriate and reasonable manner they request.
- By incorporating contributions from tribes into forest plans wherever possible, using tribal language whenever possible.

While we do not have the same legal obligation to non-recognized tribes or individual American Indians, should there be any such tribes or individuals with interests in our planning zone, we will treat their requests with the same openness and respect that we would treat any other person or interest group.