

Record of Decision  
USDA Forest Service

Carson National Forest  
Land and Resource Management Plan  
Environmental Impact Statement

Taos, Rio Arriba, Colfax and Mora Counties, New Mexico

**INTRODUCTION**

This Record of Decision documents my decision approving a land and resource management plan for the Carson National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. The Forest Plan will normally be revised in 10 years but must be revised in 15 years. Revision means the entire planning process will be repeated and a completely new plan will be prepared.

This Record of Decision describes alternatives considered and rationale for the selected alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative and the most economically efficient alternative are identified. Mitigation and monitoring measures, implementation procedures, appeal rights and the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area recommendation are described.

**DECISION**

I have selected the Proposed Action Alternative for management of the Carson National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

When compared to present management plans, the Forest Plan will:

- Place more emphasis on wildlife, recreation, and watershed resources.
- Remove slopes greater than 40 percent from lands suitable for timber production.
- Increase the sawtimber harvest for the current operator in the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit from 4.2 to 5.5 million board feet. Make an additional 1 million board feet of sawtimber and 1.1 million board feet of fuelwood, poles, posts, and vigas available to new operators.
- Construct fewer new roads by emphasizing use of existing roads.
- Eliminate seventy miles of unneeded roads each year.
- Rehabilitate all existing developed recreation sites.
- Build 13 miles of nonmotorized trail in the Canjilon Mountain/Trout Lakes area.
- Increase travel management to protect summer and winter wildlife ranges.

- Improve developed and dispersed recreation experiences by emphasizing law enforcement and maintenance of facilities.
- Annually, nominate 2-5 cultural resource properties to the National Historic Register, rehabilitate two sites, and increase inventory of nonproject areas.
- Improve wilderness management by expanding the wilderness volunteer program, law enforcement, trail maintenance, sign replacement, and public education contacts.
- Recommend an additional 30,500 acres of wilderness in the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area.
- Manage unroaded areas for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities and allow these areas to be considered for all uses, including wilderness, when the plan is revised.
- Increase emphasis on sustaining grazing capacity on previously treated areas.
- Accelerate improvement of Forest-wide watershed conditions.
- Survey and improve the condition of riparian habitats.
- Provide special management emphasis for Haplopappus microcephalus habitat, pea clam habitat, and potential research natural area.
- Increase emphasis on conservation of State and Federal threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Manage habitats to permit removal of these species from the threatened and endangered lists.
- Improve fish and wildlife habitats.

This alternative will provide quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service on the Carson National Forest. Selection of an alternative which emphasizes recreation opportunities, wildlife habitats, and watershed conditions while maintaining a viable timber sales program is appropriate and balanced.

The Forest Plan provides management direction for the Carson National Forest for the next 10-15 years. Direction is provided through a mission statement, goals, objectives, multiple use prescriptions, and standards and guidelines. The

Forest Plan contains sufficient detail to plan and carry out program level decisions. Additional environmental analysis, documentation, and public involvement will be done on site specific project proposals. No decisions for use of land or resources beyond the 10-15 year life of the plan have been made. The Plan does not address administrative operations such as personnel matters, purchasing, or organizational changes.

#### **Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area**

The Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area (43,276 acres) was evaluated for wilderness suitability as directed by Congress in Public Law 96-550. The selected alternative recommends wilderness designation for 30,500 acres. The remaining 12,776 acres will be recommended for nonwilderness.

The 12,776-acre portion is recommended for nonwilderness because of its potential timber values and potential to provide semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities. However, the present characteristics of the area will be maintained and it will be considered for all uses, including wilderness, when the Forest Plan is revised in 10 to 15 years.

These recommendations will receive further review by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the President of the United States. Final decisions on wilderness or nonwilderness are the responsibility of Congress. A legislative EIS addressing these recommendations will be prepared by the Forest Service and forwarded to Congress. Wilderness recommendations are excluded from appeal as per 36 CFR 211.18(b)(3).

#### **Valle Vidal**

In early 1982, the Pennzoil Company donated 101,794 acres of its Vermejo Ranch to the people of the United States through the U. S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service. It is now administered by the Carson National Forest.

The area is known as the Valle Vidal Unit (formerly called the Vermejo Unit) and is administered with management emphasis on recreation opportunities and wildlife resources.

Standards and guidelines for the Valle Vidal Unit are not yet included in the Forest Plan. A separate environmental analysis will be used to decide future management direction for this unit. Appropriate management prescriptions will then be incorporated in the Forest Plan.

#### **OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

##### **Alternative A - No Action Alternative**

Evaluates the effects of continuing current resource management. This is the No Action Alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act regulations.

##### **Alternative B**

Strives to meet Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) objectives assigned in the Regional Guide.

##### **Alternative C**

Emphasizes sawtimber, green fuelwood, permitted grazing use, and developed recreation all of which have market benefit values.

##### **Alternative D**

Emphasizes free fuelwood, wilderness recreation, wildlife recreation, dispersed recreation, water yield, and minimized soil loss all of which do not have the market benefit values.

##### **Alternative E**

Describes maximum levels of sawtimber that can be produced over the next 10 years.

##### **Alternative F**

Minimizes soil loss at a low budget level. Resource outputs are produced at a reduced level.

##### **Alternatives Considered, But Eliminated From Detailed Study**

A number of alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. Some were developed to determine effects of constraints and interrelationships of resource uses. Others determined the capacity to produce individual resources.

These alternatives and the reasons for eliminating them from detailed study are discussed in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Impact Statement.

#### **REASONS FOR DECISION**

My decision is based on evaluation to determine which alternative provides quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service while maximizing net public benefits. Net public benefits are the long-term benefits less costs and are measured by both quantitative and qualitative criteria rather than a single measure or index.

Net public benefits and the quality of on-the-ground management were determined by evaluating how well each alternative responded to issues, by weighing environmental consequences, assessing budget requirements, and considering public comments.

The Proposed Action Alternative is selected because it provides the highest level of issue resolution. It is the most economically efficient, and is environmentally preferable. The selected alternative provides the most balanced program within a realistic budget level and therefore, maximizes net public benefits.

#### Issue Resolution

Although all of the alternatives provide multiple use benefits while protecting or enhancing environmental quality, issues are treated differently in each alternative and each alternative resulted in varying degrees of issue resolution.

The selected alternative resolves more issues than any other alternative, and is superior or equal to all other alternatives in resolution of the following issues:

- Commercial Timber
- Wilderness
- Columbine-Hondo Wilderness Study Area
- Fish and Wildlife
- Watershed
- Dispersed Recreation
- Riparian
- Law Enforcement

The selected alternative does not resolve fuelwood, grazing, and developed recreation issues as well as other alternatives. However, the differences are not significant enough to outweigh the overall performance of the selected alternative.

#### Most Economically Efficient Alternative

The selected alternative and Alternative B are the most economically efficient. They have the highest present net value (PNV) which is the primary economic criteria for comparing alternatives. PNV is the difference between the discounted value of all outputs having a monetary value and total discounted management costs.

#### Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The selected alternative is environmentally preferred. It emphasizes wildlife, recreation, and watershed. It also provides more environmental protection than any other alternative. For example it:

- Places the most emphasis on utilizing existing road systems and minimizing construction of new roads. Obliterates and closes the most existing roads reducing erosion and conflicts between human activities and wildlife needs.
- Manages timber using integrated stand management principles. This orients timber activities to smaller units (stands) with emphasis on multiple use.
- Produces the most vegetation diversity over time. This is a critical factor for wildlife habitat as well as aesthetics.
- Provides the best mix of habitats for the management of wildlife species.
- Emphasizes stabilization, maintenance, and improvement of existing recreation facilities.
- Provides the strongest monitoring program.

#### RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The Forest received 346 written comments, 9 petitions, 425 form letters, and 61 comments from a formal public hearing on the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit. Others expressed their concerns during 11 open houses and one workshop. The Forest attended meetings set up by individuals, groups, and agencies. The concerns covered many topics and reflected differing points of view.

Changes because of public comments are:

- The final Forest Plan standards and guidelines were revised to increase emphasis on wildlife, recreation and watershed.
- The acres identified as suitable for timber production were reduced from 537,000 to 380,000. In the first year, 28 MMBF (25 sawtimber plus 3 products) will be offered for sale. Sales offerings will increase by 2 MMBF each year to a maximum of 38 MMBF (35 sawtimber plus 3 products). This sales schedule will provide the planned average annual allowable timber sale quantity of 35 MMBF per year.

- The average annual allowable timber sale quantity was reduced from 40.9 million board feet (39.9 sawtimber + 1 products) to 35 million board feet (32 sawtimber + 3 products).
- Planned timber sales were reduced in the high elevation spruce forest and increased in mixed conifer and pine.
- Clearcutting was reduced from 3,370 acres per year to 450 acres per year and uneven-aged management was increased from 0 to 310 acres per year.
- Timber sales were eliminated from slopes greater than 40 percent for the next 10 years.
- Timber sales were eliminated from the Canjilon Mountain area for the next 10 years. Timber sales in the Angostura area (near Penasco) were reduced to 0.6 million board feet.
- Timber sales were eliminated from riparian areas unless needed to meet specific visual quality or fish and wildlife objectives.
- The sawtimber sale quantity for the current operator on the Vallecitos Federal Sustained Yield Unit was reduced from 8 million board feet per year to 5.5 million board feet per year. An additional 1 million board feet of sawtimber and 1.1 million board feet of fuelwood, poles, posts, and vigas were made available to new operators.
- The proposed 10-year timber sale schedule was redesigned to be more economic by: reducing sales in spruce, not scheduling sales in large unroaded areas, reconstruction of existing roads, reducing new road construction, varying silvicultural treatments, and using more recent and localized timber benefit values.
- The monitoring section of the final Forest Plan was strengthened.
- All of the developed recreation sites will be rehabilitated.
- A 13-mile non-motorized trail will be built on Canjilon Mountain.
- More travel management areas were developed to better manage off-road vehicles.
- Nominations of cultural sites to the National Register were increased from 1 to 2-5 per year. Site rehabilitation and inventory of non-project areas were increased.

- Adjustments were made in the boundary of the Columbine-Hondo Wilderness proposal to consider wilderness characteristics, definable boundaries, and possible future wilderness use. The area proposed for wilderness was increased from 27,023 acres to 30,500 acres.
- Canjilon Mountain, Angostura, Osier Mesa, Bull Canyon, Sierra Negra, Latir, Columbine-Hondo roadless areas will be managed for semi-primitive non-motorized recreation opportunities.
- Management direction for wildlife habitat was improved. Old growth habitat was increased from 5.5 percent to 13.2 percent. Big game cover, and vegetative and animal diversity receive greater emphasis. Roads left open to the public in sensitive fish and wildlife areas have been reduced.
- Water yield from Forest activities does not increase over time.
- Soil loss was reduced due to less new road development, reduced timber sale levels, and increased road obliteration and closures.
- Miles of road eliminated from the transportation system were increased from 30 to 70 annually.
- Acreage of brush treatment in past revegetation areas was increased from 600 acres to 2,700 acres.

Numerous other suggestions and technical corrections were incorporated into the final Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan. Detailed documentation can be found in the response document which accompanies the Environmental Impact Statement.

#### MITIGATION

Mitigation requirements for maintenance and enhancement of environmental quality are incorporated into the standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan.

- Recreation opportunities are provided with levels of service appropriate to the type and extent of use expected. Standards and guidelines will protect soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources.
- Visual quality is provided through the Visual Resource Management System. Additional standards and guidelines provide direction to maintain or enhance visual quality as an integral part of other activities such as timber harvesting and road construction.

- Management and protection of cultural resources is assured through standards and guidelines that provide compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, and for coordination with State historic preservation planning. The Forest Plan also provides for Native American religious use and consultation.
- Improved wildlife habitat will be achieved through integration with other resource activities and habitat improvements. Viable populations of all native vertebrate species will be maintained. Habitats for State and Federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species will be managed to remove these species from their respective listings.
- Insect and disease conditions will be monitored on a continuing basis. Integrated forest protection methods will be used for prevention and control of insects and diseases as appropriate.
- Watershed protection and enhancement are provided through "Best Management Practices" and cooperative balancing of livestock grazing with range carrying capacity.
- Minerals and oil and gas activities will be managed through approved plans of operation insuring environmental and other resource needs are protected while developing needed mineral resources.
- Standards and guidelines are included for the management of wilderness areas and special areas recommended in the Forest Plan.

#### MONITORING

Implementation of the Forest Plan will be monitored as described in Chapter 5. The purposes of monitoring are to evaluate whether the Forest mission, goals and objectives are being realized and to determine how closely management standards and guidelines have been applied. At specified intervals monitoring results will be evaluated. The results of monitoring and evaluation will measure progress on implementation and will determine when amendments or revisions are needed.

#### IMPLEMENTATION

Continued public participation will be encouraged during implementation. Environmental analysis of site specific projects and monitoring activities will provide opportunities for public participation. Watershed condition, riparian condition, range condition, timber sales, and wildlife habitat are expected to maintain a high level of public interest.

Management of the Valle Vidal Unit will be governed by its Multiple Use Area Guide until new standards and guidelines are completed for the area. The new standards and guidelines will be developed with public involvement following NEPA guidelines. When completed, they will be included in the Forest Plan under Management Area 21, which has been set aside for Valle Vidal.

The allowable timber sale quantity averages 35 million board feet (MMBF) per year (32 MMBF of sawtimber and 3 MMBF of products). The allowable timber sale quantity is the maximum amount of timber that can be sold during the 10 year life of the Plan, but is shown as an average annual figure because most people are more familiar with annual sale volumes. Actual annual timber sales may fluctuate, but the 10-year total cannot be exceeded except for salvage or sanitation sales of timber stands which are substantially damaged by fire, windthrow, other catastrophe, or which are in imminent danger from insect or disease attack. Riparian timber stands and pure aspen stands will not be sold on a regular basis and have been excluded from lands suitable for timber production. However, occasional timber sales may be made in these areas if on-the-ground studies show that a timber sale is the proper tool to meet wildlife habitat or visual quality objectives.

The environmental analyses conducted for site specific timber sales will provide opportunities for all interested parties to participate. Individual sales will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of other multiple-use objectives. Individual timber sales may be sold where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet other multiple use objectives. Efforts will be made to reduce timber program costs through such measures as shared services, contracting, and implementation of integrated stand management principles.

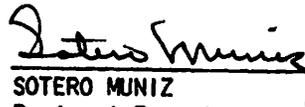
The budget for the Carson Forest Plan is an estimated annual average budget for the 10-15 year life of the Plan. It is made up of broad averages and annual investment initiatives. Annual budget requests will be based on the Forest Plan. However, if appropriations are less than requested, modified rates of implementation and additional operating efficiencies will be examined so that planned on-the-ground results will be achieved. Individual projects will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of multiple use objectives prescribed in the Forest Plan. Individual projects may be implemented where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet multiple use objectives as established by the direction in the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement appears in the Federal Register. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Forest Plan the first year of implementation. Existing projects as well as contractual obligations will continue as planned. As soon as practicable after approval of the Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Forest Plan. Subsequent administrative activities affecting such lands, including budget proposals, shall be based on the Forest Plan. The Forest Supervisor may change proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and appropriated funds. Such scheduled changes shall not be considered a significant amendment to the Forest Plan. Changes significantly altering the long-term relationship between levels of multiple use goods and services compared to those projected under actual appropriations may be significant amendments.

The Forest Supervisor may amend the Forest Plan but must determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the plan. If the change is determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor shall follow the same procedure as that required for development and approval of a Forest Plan. If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of National Environmental Policy Act procedures.

#### APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision, except for wilderness recommendations, is subject to administrative review in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be made in writing and submitted to Sotero Muniz, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service, 517 Gold Avenue SW., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102, within 45 days from the date of this decision. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.

  
SOTERO MUNIZ  
Regional Forester

OCT 31 1986  
Date