



May 23, 2022

File code: 1920

Dear Interested Party,

The Kootenai National Forest has completed a Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report (BMER) as required of the 2012 Planning Rule at 36 CFR 219.12(d). It evaluates monitoring questions and indicators presented in the Land Resource Management Plan (LRMP) monitoring plan chapter, in relation to management actions carried out in the plan area. Providing timely, accurate monitoring information to the responsible official and the public is a key requirement of the plan monitoring program.

Monitoring results are evaluated in order to make findings on the status or existing conditions of plan components selected for monitoring. Based on the findings, recommendations can be made for changes needed in forest plan direction, such as plan components or other plan content that guide management of resources in the plan area (e.g. forest plan, management activities, monitoring program, or forest assessment). The BMER is designed to provide the necessary information to help the responsible official determine a course of action based on the recommended management adjustments of this BMER. It is not a decision document. Future management decisions with appropriate environmental documentation may occur based on the BMER recommendations. The full 2021 biennial monitoring report for the Kootenai National Forest is available at: [KNF Land Management Planning Page](#).

See Table 1 for a summary of the findings and recommendations.

There are no BMER recommendations for changes to the LRMP plan component language.

Based on the BMER recommendations for changes to the monitoring plan, administrative changes are proposed for public notice and consideration of comments [36 CFR 219.16(c)(6)]. (table 1)



Table 1. Proposed administrative modifications to the LRMP Monitoring Plan.

PLAN COMPONENT	MONITORING ITEM	YEAR UPDATED	PLAN INTENT ¹ <i>Do monitoring results demonstrate intended progress (i.e. meeting, maintaining, trending, or advancing) of the associated plan components listed with this monitoring item?</i>	RECOMMENDATION ² <i>Based on the evaluation of monitoring results, may changes be warranted?</i>	MANAGEMENT ² <i>If a change may be warranted, where may the change be needed?²</i>
VEGETATION: FW-DC-VEG-01 FW-DC-VEG-02 FW-DC-VEG-03 FW-DC-VEG-04 FW-DC-VEG-05 FW-DC-VEG-06 FW-DC-VEG-07 FW-DC-VEG-08 FW-DC-VEG-11	MON-VEG-01: To what extent are management activities and natural disturbance processes trending toward desired conditions for vegetation composition, structure, and pattern, increasing resistance and resiliency to disturbance factors including climate change? This includes vegetation dominance type and size, old growth, down wood, snags, fire-killed forest, and insect and disease infested forest.	2021	(B) Uncertain/ (E) YES – As this is the first and baseline report, more time/data are needed to understand status or progress of the Plan Component(s) as most results show progress towards desired conditions, but some are trending away. Objectives and guidelines are being met.	Yes	<p>1. Plan Monitoring Recommendation: Consider changing to one indicator for this question: the results of the annual Northern Region Restoration and Resiliency Reports. Restoration and developing resilient vegetation through vegetation treatments each year is an overall goal of the outcomes of treatments that we invest in and accomplish each year. A set of requirements were established to determine if a treatment outcome was projected to be resilient. The requirements in the R1 Restoration and Resiliency Guide list detailed criteria for resilience at the treatment unit level and involve composition, structure, and pattern of vegetation treatments that trend forests to a more resilient desired condition as contained in Forest Plan Desired Conditions. They often involve establishing or maintaining early seral, shade-intolerant vegetation. Appropriate forest density treatments are summarized as a characteristic of resilience, as are characteristic patch sizes. Vegetation treatments other than associated with trees are also assessed for their resilience outcomes. All these outcomes are anticipated to be resilient under current and future climate and changes. These treatments are considered adaptation options that are being implemented under an adaptive management context. Recommend dropping Indicator 2 – Acres burned. Already included as part of Indicator 1.</p> <p>There are 3 old growth indicators. Recommend dropping or rewording Indicator 6 – Acres of old growth treated. What are the effects of treatments? Answering this question alone does not get to the monitoring question, even in context of the other 7 indicators.</p> <p>2. Implementation and Outcome Progress Recommendations: Update the Standards/Steps for Data Collection, Analysis Methods, and How Evaluated for all indicators in the Monitoring Guide (pgs. 13-17) based on the Data Sources/Partners in the MON-VEG-01 report, especially when RO data is provided for consistent methodology, analysis, and protocols across the region. Coordinate with RO ahead of time to get datasets that match the forest to compare like data; potentially include additional data to assist with forest analysis efforts (e.g. MON-VEG-01-01 and 03: dominance type and size class matching KIPZ Forest Plan biophysical settings and R1 Broad PVTs; MON-VEG-01-04: FIA old growth by Geographic Area).</p> <p>Frequency of Measurement (Monitoring Guide, pg. 13): Recommend changing wording where it reads “Every 5 years”; the FIA produces FIA</p>



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					estimates after 50% of the data has been refreshed (so on a 5 year basis). Analysis Methods (Monitoring Guide, pg. 13): Recommend updating this wording as it references "... acres burned via unplanned ignitions (wildfires)" in Performance Indicator 3 – Acres of forest by dominance type and size class compared to the desired condition. Method doesn't match indicator. Unit of Measure (Monitoring Guide, pg. 16): Recommend updating to read "Number of snags <i>per acre</i> ." References (Monitoring Guide, pg. 16): Recommend updating/replacing with R1 Snag and Live Tree Density reports. Bush and Reyes 2020 is the most current reference and methodology for this indicator. It incorporates the current references listed.
VEGETATION: FW-DC-VEG-10	MON-VEG-02: Have management activities met Plan objectives and trended towards desired conditions for invasive terrestrial plant species?	2021	Yes	Yes	Increase monitoring intensity and add indicators tracking effectiveness of treatment
FIRE: FW-DC-FIRE-02	MON-FIRE-01 To what extent are management activities moving hazardous fuels towards desired conditions?	2021	Yes	No	Management activities are progressing towards desired conditions by treating between 5,000 to 15,000 acres annually across the Kootenai National Forest. Hazardous fuels are reduced annually within the WUI and other areas where values are at risk. By reducing hazardous fuels, fire behavior can be classified as low-intensity surface fires with limited crown fire potential while reducing the risk for large scale, stand replacement wildfires. This is further evidenced by a 95 percent success rate of a fire behavior change as a result of treatments
FIRE: FW-DC-FIRE-03	MON-FIRE-02: To what extent is unplanned fire used to trend vegetation towards desired conditions?	2021	Yes - The number of unplanned ignitions managed for the maintenance and/or restoration of fire adapted ecosystems does not provide a measurement of how vegetation is trending towards desired conditions. Additionally, unplanned ignitions are rarely managed on the Kootenai National Forest due to several factors such as seasonality, environmental conditions,	Yes - The indicator may not be appropriate because the indicator does not directly address the question of how unplanned natural ignitions are trending vegetation towards desired conditions. Additionally, since the development of the plan, terminology for utilizing unplanned natural ignitions has changed	Federal policy changed in 2009 allowing fire managers to manage fires for multiple objectives on the same fire. For example, fire managers may be simultaneously managing for resource benefit on one flank of the fire while suppressing another flank that threatens values at risk. In this example, acres of vegetation may be trending towards desired conditions but this fire would be considered a suppression fire.

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			national/regional preparedness levels, resource availability, and values at risk. FW-OBJ-FIRE-02 calls for over the life of the plan, manage natural, unplanned ignitions to meet resource objectives on at least 10 percent of the ignitions. Data shows that only 3 percent of natural unplanned ignitions were managed in 2016, 4 percent in 2017, and zero percent in 2018-2020. In contrast, when analyzing acres of natural unplanned ignitions that are trending towards vegetation desired conditions, 58,660.95 acres of natural unplanned ignitions are trending towards vegetation desired conditions from 2016-2018.	which makes for poor quality data extraction from databases and is difficult and cumbersome. Recommendation is to change the indicator for MON-FIRE-02 from number of unplanned ignitions managed for the maintenance and/or restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems, and the number of unplanned natural ignition managed with the primary goal of suppression to acres of natural unplanned ignitions that are trending towards vegetation desired conditions.	
WATERSHED: FW-DC-WTR-01 FW-DC-WTR-02 FW-DC-WTR-03 FW-DC-WTR-04	MON-WTR-01 Are soil, water quality, and riparian and aquatic habitats protected and moving towards desired conditions?	2021	Uncertain - Methods inadequate to answer monitoring question. The performance indicator of percent BMPs properly implemented and percent that were effective answers most of the monitoring question. However, the trending aquatic habitat toward desired conditions may need additional information.	Yes Based on the evaluation of monitoring results, it is recommended that either: a) Rewrite the monitoring question so that trends in percent BMP implementation and effectiveness are all that is needed to answer the question. b) Include an additional analysis indicator such as PIBO to add context to whether the Forest trending as desired.	Update the monitoring guide to reflect an approach that would revise the monitoring question or add an additional performance indicator.

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WATERSHED: FW-DC-WTR-01 FW-DC-WTR-02 FW-DC-WTR-03	MON-WTR-02 To what extent are management activities moving watersheds towards desired conditions?	2021	MON-WTR-02-01: Yes, Implementation of Plan components are trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. MON-WTR-02-02: Uncertain - Methods inadequate to answer monitoring question. The monitoring results demonstrate progress toward achieving the plan objectives. However, if we are going to continue its use, the process needs to be re-written using the data and analysis techniques available today. In addition to the issues with the soil detrimental disturbance assumptions and INFRA data, analyzing FACTS data is considerably different then analyzing TSMRS data, therefore, the analysis process needs to be updated and adjusted using the latest techniques, software, and databases available. This would take considerable time and research to be reproducible.	MON-WTR-02-01: None MON-WTR-02-02: a) Re-invest in another GIS/database exercise but there needs to be a long-term commitment to upkeep and scrutinize each factor in the analysis. b) Use the PIBO data and annual reports at the Forest scale and the, perhaps the 5 th code HUC (10-digit) scale to monitor changes that are reflected in stream channels	MON-WTR-02-01: NA MON-WTR-02-02: Update the monitoring guide to reflect an approach that would provide an answer to the monitoring question
AQUATIC HABITAT: FW-DC-AQH-01 FW-DC-AQH-02 FW-DC-AQH-04 FW-DC-AQH-05	MON-AQH-01: To what extent is the Forest meeting Forest Plan objectives and trending towards desired condition to reconnect fragmented stream habitat to increase population resilience to	2021	Yes.	No	None

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	disturbance including climate change?				
SOILS: FW-DC-SOIL-01 FW-DC-SOIL-03 FW-DC-SOIL-04	MON-SOIL-01 To what extent has coarse woody debris been retained for long-term soil productivity and other ecosystem functions?	2021	Yes	Soils staff work with implementation and fuel treatment staff to identify action items necessary to achieve the Forest Plan guideline based on pre-harvest survey data	Management activities need to ensure proper retention of CWD. Communication between soils, silviculture, fuels, and sale administration will identify actions to improve guideline compliance.
SOILS: FW-DC-SOIL-02	MON-SOIL-02 To what extent have vegetation management activities prevented irreversible damage to soil conditions?	2021	Yes	No	None
RIPARIAN: FW-DC-RIP-01 FW-DC-RIP-02 FW-DC-RIP-03 FW-DC-RIP-04 FW-DC-RIP-05	MON-RIP-01: Have riparian and wetland areas been maintained or improved to provide for healthy streams and aquatic environments to increase resiliency to disturbance including climate change?	2021	YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE progressing, toward plan objectives.	No	No
FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES: FW-DC-WL-02 FW-DC-WL-03 FW-DC-WL-04	MON-FLS-01-01 – Grizzly Bear: progress towards achieving and maintaining standards for percent core area, OMRD, and TMRD within the Recovery Zones	2021	YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. The Forest is either at or better than the BMU standards or is trending towards the standards and expected to meet them in the next few years. BORZ metrics show temporary increases above the standards, which is allowed for project activities. Illegal use was included in the calculations which is generally temporary in	Yes	Consider replacing linear miles of open/total motorized routes with secure habitat as the metric for BORZ under FW-STD-WL-02.

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			nature. Illegal use should be displayed separately because it is not a FS authorized activity.		
FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES: FW-DC-WL-03	MON-FLS-01-02: Canada lynx: changes in lynx habitat as a result of moving towards the desired conditions for vegetation through vegetation management, prescribed fire, or natural disturbance	2021	YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. Most LAUs are better than the standards for the amount of early stand initiation habitat. The one LAU that is not better than the standard is due to several large fires in recent years. The amount of groomed/designated over the snow routes or ski areas is at or better than baseline conditions.	No	None
FEDERALLY LISTED SPECIES: FW-DC-AQH-03 FW-DC-AQS-01 FW-DC-AQS-04 FW-DC-AQS-05	MON-FLS-01-03: Bull Trout population trends based on redd counts in known spawning reaches	2020	No – Redd count numbers are down in nearly every bull trout stream across the forest but this is independent of plan implementation.	No	None
FOCAL SPECIES: FW-DC-WL-01 FW-DC-WL-09	MON-FOC-01-01: Landbird assemblage (insectivores): a) number of acres where planned ignitions were used to maintain/improve habitat; b) percentage of natural, unplanned ignitions managed for the maintenance or restoration or fire adapted ecosystems	2020	For FW-OBJ-WL-03: (E) YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. With the exception of 2020, we met FW-OBJ-WL-03 by using prescribed fire on 1,000-5,000 acres that benefited species preferring open habitats. Covid-19 precautions prevented prescribed burning in 2020.	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritize accomplishment data entry into WIT. • Consider rewording FW-OBJ-WL-03 to clarify which specific focal species are expected to benefit from the use of fire to maintain/restore habitat. • Consider rewording MON-FOC-01 to tie more directly to FW-OBJ-WL-03 or FW-DC-WL-19 and clearly showing that we are interested in the amount of prescribed fire that is benefitting landbirds that prefer open habitats. • Drop all reference to the other plan components listed in the monitoring plan for MON-FOC-01. • Consider dropping the second indicator which looks at the percentage of natural, unplanned ignitions managed for the

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					<p>maintenance or restoration or fire adapted ecosystems. That indicator is already tracked under MON-FIRE-02.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As per Latif et al. 2019, consider changing some of the focal species in the landbird assemblage
WILDLIFE: FW-DC-WL-01 FW-DC-WL-09 FW-DC-WL-17 FW-DC-WL-18 FW-DC-WL-19	MON-WDL-01-01: Acres of terrestrial habitat restored or enhanced	2020	(E) YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. We are easily meeting FW-OBJ-WL-01 by accomplishing at least 1,000-5,000 acres of habitat maintenance and restoration.	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize accomplishment data entry into WIT. Although the available data on acreages indicates that FW-OBJ-WL-01 is being met, the KNF lacks data on the species benefitted by activities if the data is in FACTS only. Also, the KNF is possibly missing acres of accomplishments that should be in WIT and that aren't normally also tracked in FACTS (e.g. nest boxes, toilet vent caps). Consider rewording the monitoring question MON-WDL-01 to tie more directly to FW-OBJ-WL-01 and the indicators listed for MON-WDL-01-01. Drop all reference to the other plan components listed in the monitoring plan for MON-WDL-01.
WILDLIFE: FW-DC-WL-08 FW-DC-WL-16	MON-WDL-02: Number of planning subunits providing >30% security and >50% security on NFS lands during the hunting season	2021	Uncertain - More time/data are needed to understand status or progress of the Plan Component(s). The 2021 calculations are not directly comparable to the 2012 calculations used in USDA 2013; therefore, it is difficult to discern if conditions are trending towards FW-OBJ-WL-02. The 2021 calculations better align with the intent of the elk security direction in the 2015 Forest Plan as identified by Anderson (2015). Going forward, the next several monitoring reports (e.g. 2023, 2025) can be compared to the 2021 numbers to get a better understanding of progress towards FW-OBJ-WL-02 based upon the	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider rewording this monitoring question to tie more directly to FW-OBJ-WL-02. Drop the reference in the monitoring plan to FW-GDL-WL-10 and focus this monitoring question on FW-OBJ-WL-02

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			coarse scale motorized access management calculations.		
ACCESS & RECREATION: FW-DC-AR-01 FW-DC-AR-02 FW-DC-AR-04	MON-AR-01: Have appropriate management actions been taken on recreation sites where opportunities have been identified, use is at or near capacity, or where there are resource concerns?	2020	Yes – recreational opportunities have increased in several different areas such as rental cabins and campgrounds.	No	None
ACCESS & RECREATION: FW-DC-AR-05 FW-DC-AR-07	MON-AR-02: Have management activities trended towards desired conditions for a minimum transportation system that provides recreation opportunities, allows for safe and efficient public and agency access, and is environmentally compatible?	2021	YES - Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired. As the monitoring results demonstrate, the road storage, decommissioning, and road maintenance being accomplished as well as the transportation system open for public travel, the KNF continues to contribute to progress of achieving FW-OBJ-AR-03 as well as the desired conditions listed for this monitoring item.	Yes	Some data was hard to find and likely not all accomplishments entered into database of record due to inadequate staffing at different times over the years. Management at all levels needs to recognize need for adequate personnel to keep up with NEPA decisions and accomplishments that need to be tracked in NRM and WIT databases. Better end of year reporting is needed as well as more coordination between watershed and engineering personnel to assure all storage and decommissioning for each year is tracked and entered into the appropriate location of the INFRA and WIT databases. Some updates to the monitoring guide suggested as listed in the more detailed section of this report.
ACCESS & RECREATION: FW-DC-AR-05	MON-AR-03: To what extent are motorized and non-motorized winter and summer trail recreation opportunities available for a variety of users?	2020	Yes – Opportunities have been maintained with some reduction in summer motorized opportunities.	No	None
ACCESS & RECREATION: FW-DC-AR-01	MON-AR-04: What are the trends in visitation forest wide, and are visitors satisfied with the facilities, access,	2017	Yes – Trending positively	No	None

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	services, and perceptions of their safety?				
WILDERNESS: FW-DC-AR-06	MON-WLDN-01: have management activities met Forest Plan desired conditions and standards, and trended towards management area desired conditions for designated wilderness and Wilderness Study Area?	2020	Yes – trending positively.	No	None
CULTURAL RESOURCES: FW-DC-CR-01	MON-CR-01: To what extent is the Forest meeting forest plan objectives and trending towards desired condition to identify, evaluate, and nominate cultural resources for listing on the National Register of Historic Places?	2021	Yes. The KNF is maintaining identifying and evaluating cultural resources. No. The Forest has not listed any on the National Register of Historic Places. This can be a long process depending on the type of historic property.	Yes	Separate into separate monitoring results. National Register forms are large and require a significant amount of time to complete. Increase staffing to accomplish.
CULTURAL RESOURCES: FW-DC-CR-02	MON-CR-02: To what extent are 1) historic properties protected and 2) public education and 3) interpretation provided to move towards desired conditions?	2021	1) Uncertain. Historic properties are being protected from active management but are not being protected from vandalism. 2) Yes, public education is provided on an annual basis. 3) Yes, but not on a consistent basis.	Yes	Separate into separate monitoring results to easier determine deficiencies.
AMERICAN INDIAN RIGHTS & INTERESTS: FW-DC-AI-01	MON-AI-01: To what extent is the Forest meeting Forest Plan objectives and trending towards desired conditions for consultation with each Tribe?	2021	Yes, the Forest consults with each Tribe on projects.	Yes	All staff should be sending project proposals to Tribes.

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AMERICAN INDIAN RIGHTS & INTERESTS: FW-DC-AI-02	MON-AI-02: To what extent has the agreement for access and acquisition of forest products for traditional cultural uses progressed in consultation with each Tribe?	2021	Yes. The 2019 Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority authorizes grant of trees, portions of trees, or forest products to federally recognized Indian Tribes for a wide variety of noncommercial uses and “traditional and cultural purposes.” There have been no requests for access and acquisition for forest products.	Yes	Data bases should be queried to provide numbers on acquisition of forest products by Tribal members.
AMERICAN INDIAN RIGHTS & INTERESTS: FW-DC-AI-03	MON-AI-03: To what extent is the Forest meeting Forest Plan objectives and trending towards desired conditions for protecting traditional cultural areas?	2021	Yes. Federal agencies have trust responsibilities to American Indian Tribes under treaty and in compliance with various laws and executive orders. The Forest is also required to consult with all federally recognized tribes that had/have traditional uses within the forest boundary. The Forest is knowledgeable on traditional cultural areas. There have been no comments or concerns received from Tribes.	No	None
TIMBER: FW-DC-TBR-01 FW-DC-TBR-04	MON-TBR-01 To what extent is the Forest meeting Forest Plan objectives and trending towards desired conditions to provide a mix of timber products in response to market demands?	2021	Yes - Ten year average for harvest is within the range of ecologically sustainable productivity for the landscape.	No	None.

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TIMBER: FW-DC-TBR-01 FW-DC-TBR-02 FW-DC-TBR-03	MON-TBR-02 To what extent is the Forest meeting NFMA requirements and desired conditions on size of harvest openings.	2021	C) Uncertain, current indicators are not appropriate to assess the status of the plan component. .	Yes	Monitoring Plan: Suggest to change the monitoring question and indicators to “What management has occurred to create the pattern of forest conditions to move towards FW-DC-VEG-05. Indicator change to # and size of even-aged regeneration harvest units exceeding 40 acres in size reported by biophysical setting.
TIMBER: FW-DC-TBR-02 FW-DC-TBR-03	MON-TBR-03 To what extent are regeneration units restocked to trend towards vegetation desired conditions?	2021	Yes	No	None
MINERALS: FW-DC-MIN-01	MON-MIN-01 Are reclamation activities improving ecological and human health conditions?	2021	Yes - AML sites have been and are continuing to be reclaimed.	None	KNF will continue to document and reclaim AML sites as they are discovered on the Forest.

Questions or comments on the BMER findings and recommendations and/or the proposed administrative change may be directed to ([KNF Contact Page](#)). Comments will be accepted until 30 June, 2022 (FSH 1909.12, 21.5). Administrative changes are not subject to the objection process (36 CFR 219.50). Upon considerations of comments, the proposed changes to the LRMP Monitoring Plan will be finalized and effective upon signature of the responsible official Chad Benson, Kootenai National Forest Supervisor and published to the Kootenai National Forest website ([KNF Land Management Planning Page](#)).

Sincerely,

/s/ Chad W. Benson

CHAD W BENSON
Forest Supervisor

