Topic: Rainbow Family National Incident on National Forests
Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Rainbow Family of Living Light?
The Rainbow Family of Living Light is a loose-knit group of people who gather annually on a national forest. They describe themselves as having no leaders and no organization.

2. What is the National Gathering?
The Rainbow Family holds a national gathering once a year. Since the first gathering near Strawberry Lake on the Arapaho National Forest in 1972, the incident has taken place on a different national forest each year. In recent years, national gatherings have attracted approximately 5,000-10,000 people. Local and regional gatherings occur during other times of the year. The incident this summer is expected to draw around 10,000 visitors.

3. How does the Rainbow Family decide where to gather?
At the end of each annual gathering, members form a “vision council” to meet to discuss the location of the following year’s event.

4. How and when is the specific site selected?
During the spring and early summer, Rainbow scouts research and visit areas to find a suitable location, according to their standards. Scouts may visit local Forest Service offices requesting information and maps. In mid-June the spring council occurs, often at the location of the annual gathering. The specific location and time typically are not revealed to the Forest Service until this happens. The location for the 2022 Gathering was announced on June 14, 2022 by the Rainbow Family.

5. When does the National Gathering begin?
Within one week of the spring council about 1,000-2,000 attendees arrive on site. There will be a continual build-up of Rainbow Family members reaching 5,000-10,000 people by July 4. Once the site is determined, the Rainbow Family utilizes the internet and other communication methods to let others know the location and directions to the site.

6. When does the gathering end?
The incident peaks on July 4. After that, there is a drastic reduction in attendance. However, there is a group of Rainbows that stay to clean up and rehabilitate the site. There may be other people as well that remain for a couple weeks.

7. How does the Forest Service manage this event?
The Forest Service assigns a National Incident Management Team (NIMT) for the event. Team objectives include:
   • Address health and safety risks to the public and participants.
   • Minimize environmental impacts with Law Enforcement presence and action.
   • Recognize and mitigate social and political impacts.
   • Respect civil rights of all members of the public.

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• Work in partnership with tribal, state, county, and local law enforcement, health, and other organizations.

8. Does the Rainbow Family get a permit?
The Forest Service requires a Special Use permit for every public group of 75 or more people conducting a meeting or event on National Forest System lands.

The Rainbow Family has consistently refused to comply with the permit process during national gatherings, since they claim to have no leaders and no one member who can speak for the group or sign a permit on behalf of the Family.

9. Why is the Forest Service cooperating with an event that doesn’t have a permit?
The Forest Service has periodically cited Rainbow Family members for failing to obtain a permit. However, the agency also works with the family to adhere to a resource protection plan in lieu of a special use permit to protect the health and safety of individuals at the incident and in the surrounding community, to ensure sensitive resources are protected, to minimize any environmental damage and to coordinate post-event cleanup and rehabilitation of the event site.

10. What does the resource protection plan address?
A resource protection plan will be developed and issued once a site has been determined. The primary goals of the plan are:

• Public health and safety.
• Minimizing the impact to the resources and leaving the site at or near pre-incident conditions.
• Minimizing impacts and disruptions to local communities, adjacent landowners, and other special use permittees.

Issues typically addressed in the resource protection plan are locating camps, kitchens and slit trenches away from water sources; trash removal; and rehabilitation of the site after the incident.

11. How does a large group, potentially 5,000 to 10,000 people, live in the woods?
As soon as Rainbow Family members select a site, they set up a welcome tent, camping and social areas, parking and shuttle areas, health care areas, and several outdoor kitchens. They develop water sources and dig trench latrines. There is no fee for attendance, but they collect donations for food and other necessary items for distribution. They designate special areas for group gatherings, families with children, men, women, and partygoers, to name a few. Attendees are advised to bring their own camping gear. Family members use campfires exclusively to cook on.

12. What resource impacts may occur?
Possible resource impacts include compacted soil, water quality degradation, sanitation issues, disturbance to sensitive archaeological sites, disruptions to threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and fire danger.

13. What social impacts are expected?
The group represents a very diverse group of individuals. As with any large population, a certain percentage of incident participants can be expected to engage in illegal or socially unacceptable behaviors. In part, some activities may include public nudity, civil disobedience, drug and alcohol abuse, confrontations between Rainbows and locals, abandoned or disabled vehicles, and traffic congestion and parking for 4,000-7,000 vehicles.
14. Can the Rainbows use campfires if fire restrictions are in place?
No, the participants must abide by all local, state, and federal laws, including fire restrictions.

15. Will fire restrictions be put in place to reduce the likelihood of a wildfire during the incident?
Fire restrictions will be put in place under all normal protocols.

Forest visitors will be reminded to use extreme caution if fire restrictions are in place. Fire prevention and law enforcement will be patrolling, and those who violates the fire restrictions may be ticketed.

16. Does the Forest Service test the water?
The Forest Service does conduct water quality testing as part of the regular monitoring procedures. If during these tests the data indicates there is a problem, the appropriate health departments will be contacted, and possible closure orders put in place.

17. Who will rehabilitate the area after the incident concludes?
It is the Rainbow Family’s responsibility to do rehabilitation of the land. Site rehabilitation guidelines will be outlined in the resource protection plan. At past events, many individuals have stayed to assist in site clean-up, and the Rainbows have paid for trash disposal with a local vendor. Forest officials anticipate this will occur again this year.

18. What role does the state and county play in this event?
Management of the event is coordinated with local officials, including all Tribal, federal, state, county, and local law enforcement agencies, as well as emergency service organizations, public health departments, and social services.

19. Will there be any special closure orders in effect?
The Forest may issue special closure orders to protect the health and safety of visitors and/or natural resources that could be impacted by the incident.

20. Will the area of the incident be open to the public?
Yes. However, all national forest visitors must obey federal, state, and local laws and regulations. The Forest Service takes the enforcement of those laws very seriously. There may be impacts to the community, neighbors, and other forest visitors. The Forest Service will work hard to minimize any negative effects to local communities and the environment.