



File Code: 1920; 1940
Date: February 9, 2024

Dear Interested Forest User:

The Cherokee National Forest is seeking comments on proposed changes to the monitoring program for the 2004 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (RLRMP). The 2012 Planning Rule, codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (36 CFR 219) guides forest planning requirements for developing, amending and revising land management plans (219.7 and 219.13) for units of the National Forest System (NFS). The 2012 Planning Rule allows for corrections or adjustments to the Forest Plan using a process called "Administrative Changes". "Administrative Changes as defined by 36 CFR 219.13(c) in The 2012 Planning Rule is "... any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statutory or regulatory requirements, or other content in the plan (219.7(f))." As is identified in Chapter 5 of the RLRMP for the Cherokee National Forest dated January, 2004.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation are separate, sequential activities required by the National Forest Management Act and serve as continuous learning tools that form the backbone of adaptive management.

- Monitoring is the repeated collection of data by observation or measurement to evaluate changes in condition and progress toward meeting management objectives. The data collected helps inform our decision making.
- Evaluation is the analysis and interpretation of monitoring data to present it in a clear, concise, and compelling manner in a monitoring report.

Monitoring data and the evaluation of it are summarized in a monitoring report. These reports have several uses. Among other things, the reports:

- Help determine whether we need to change the Forest Plan, monitoring program, or conduct an assessment to evaluate a changed condition in more detail.
- Help determine what type of management activities should be proposed in the future to help achieve desired condition.
- Are frequently referenced in our NEPA documents to support our effects analysis for proposed activities.

The Forest Plan Monitoring Program

The 2004 RLRMP monitoring program focused on evaluating the achievement of desired conditions, goals, objectives, and whether there was a need to change the plan. The program was updated in 2016 to conform to new direction from the 2012 Planning Rule. The 2004 monitoring program is located in Appendix G of the Forest Plan. The most recent monitoring and evaluation



report includes the monitoring questions added in the 2016 update. These files are available online at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/chokeee/landmanagement/planning>.

Proposed Administrative Change

The Cherokee National Forest is proposing an administrative change to the existing Forest Plan monitoring program. The change would replace the current Forest Plan monitoring program with 30 questions, some of which have multiple indicators. The questions are enclosed. They include many elements from our current monitoring program and were developed to focus on information needed to determine whether management activities are effectively achieving desired outcomes. Monitoring questions that did not inform management decisions or that were addressed through other reports or data calls were removed.

The proposed monitoring program has two tiers as follows:

- **Tier 1** includes questions and indicators where it is within the fiscal capability of the Cherokee National Forest to collect and evaluate the data. The Forest Service is responsible for addressing all Tier 1 questions.
- **Tier 2** includes questions and indicators that require additional capacity to complete monitoring tasks. The Forest Service would coordinate with stakeholders to address Tier 2 questions. As such, Tier 2 questions have a shared responsibility, and therefore, the Cherokee National Forest monitoring team cannot assure the timing and quality of data collection and/or the evaluation of these questions. For many Tier 2 questions, relationships with partners currently exist, and partners are currently engaged in monitoring collection or data interpretation, while other Tier 2 questions would not be possible without additional resources or capacity.

How to Comment

Comments regarding proposed changes to the monitoring program will be accepted until **March 11, 2024**. Comments should be mailed to Cherokee National Forest, 2800 Ocoee Street N, Cleveland, TN 37312 or emailed to SM.FS.r8chersocom@usda.gov. Please state "Monitoring Program Update" in the subject line when providing electronic comments or on the envelope when replying by mail.

The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are Monday through Friday from 9:00 am to 11:00 am and 12:00 pm to 4:00 pm, excluding holidays. Please note that comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be available for public inspection as part of the planning record.

This letter will be posted on the Cherokee National Forest website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/chokeee/landmanagement>.

This Administrative Change becomes effective when signed after comment period, and being posted online at the Forest's website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/chokeee/landmanagement>. Administrative changes are not subject to the objection process (36 CFR 219.50).

If you have questions about this Administrative Change or would like additional information, please contact Christopher Joyner, Public Information and Community Engagement Staff Officer, at Christopher.joyner@usda.gov.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL A WRIGHT
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: Christopher Joyner