

# Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests Plan Revision

**“NEED TO CHANGE” COMMUNITY CONVERSATION WORKSHOPS**  
*Summary Report*

*October 15, 2015*





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## **Overview**

Ten public workshops were held in communities near the Helena and Lewis & Clark National Forests (HLC NFs) in August and September 2015. The purpose of the workshops was to solicit citizen input on current forest resource conditions, the challenges facing these resources, and what “needs to change” from the 1986 forest plans during the plan revision process currently underway.

Evening workshops were conducted in Stanford, Great Falls, Browning, Choteau, White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton, Townsend, Helena and Lincoln, between August 10 and September 2, 2015, and a morning meeting was held in Augusta on August 14. Approximately 180 people participated in the workshops.

Workshop goals were: (1) to share information about what forest planning is, why it’s being done now, and the current status of the process; (2) to hear citizens’ concerns and issues as they related to the HLC NFs; and (3) to build relationships between the HLC NFs and the public that will serve everyone as the forest planning process moves forward.

A general overview of the information shared by the HLC NFs at all 10 workshops is provided below, followed by a brief summary of the public comments received from each of the communities where they were conducted. This information is followed by community-specific descriptions that provide additional detail about the public comments received.

This summary captures what was said at the ten community workshops and does not represent the views of all citizens, the HLC NFs, or the University of Montana. Rather, it reflects the specific issues and concerns of those who participated in the workshops. Some issues heard from the public may be out of the scope of the HLC NFs forest plan revision process. These concerns have been captured and passed on to the appropriate Forest Service staff.

This summary report was prepared by the Center for Natural Resources & Environmental Policy at the University of Montana (Center), which is providing facilitation and meeting management services for the HLC NFs plan revision team. The Center is responsible for any errors or omissions in the report. Comments and corrections should be directed to Shawn Johnson at [shawn.johnson@umontana.edu](mailto:shawn.johnson@umontana.edu).

## ***Information Shared***

### What is a Forest Plan?

Erin Swiader, HLC NF Forest Plan Revision Team Leader described a forest plan as “the view from 30,000 feet.” The plan provides guidance for forest management and activities for the next 10-30 years. There will be plan components that include desired conditions, objectives, guidelines, and standards.

### Why are we revising the plans now?

The plans are being revised now because the last plans, both completed in 1986, are almost 30 years old and outdated. Additionally, the HLC NFs are in the process of consolidation, so instead of two forest plans (as in 1986), there will be a single plan for the combined HLC NFs. Additionally a new planning rule providing new guidance for forest planning was issued in 2012. The new plan will be developed using this new guidance.

### What is not addressed in planning?

Two items were highlighted that will not be addressed in the forest plan revision process: travel planning and Inventory Roadless Area boundaries. Travel planning has been accomplished within the HLC NFs over the past several years and forthcoming decisions will complete travel plans covering the entire HLC NFs. The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule does not provide for boundary adjustment.

### What has been accomplished so far with Forest Plan Revision?

The HLC NFs released a forestwide assessment in March of 2015. It describes current conditions and trends in 15 resource areas and it provides the foundation for understanding the current state of the forest resources. It set the stage for the “What needs to change?” discussions at the ten community workshops. Copies of the assessment were made available to review during the workshop and were also available on line prior to the workshops. The assessment can be found online at the following [link](#).

Most recently, the team has been working on the “Preliminary Need to Change” document which is posted on the HLC NFs Forest Plan Revision [website](#). The document identifies the need to change the forest plan and is the transition from the assessment to the forest plan development phase. It identifies the current plan direction that needs to be revised to address the conditions, trends, and risks evident from the assessment analysis. The preliminary need to change document helps define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the environmental analysis related to the planning process. It also establishes the framework for development of the plan.

### What's next?

Later this fall, there will be another series of public workshops to discuss forestwide and geographic area “desired conditions”. Then, there will be another series of workshops to discuss management areas. These workshops will build off one another by collecting public feedback on key components of what will become a new forest plan.

### Other Related Processes under the Plan Revision Umbrella.

A Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Study is being completed and will be available online for public review and comment in the fall of 2015. Wild and scenic rivers are specially designated rivers with outstanding and remarkable value through forest lands. They are free flowing in character. Two studies in 1989 identified 14 rivers in

the HLC NFs. This study is now being redone to list eligible rivers and identify if any conditions have changed.

The Wilderness Evaluation is also underway. An inventory of possible areas to be recommended for wilderness will be made available for public review and comment in the upcoming months.

### How to Use the Best Available Science to Inform Decisions about Future Forest Conditions?

“Best available science” is a big part of the new 2012 planning rule. One of the ways the HLC NFs is doing this is by modeling the natural range of variation (NRV) to expand our understanding of what the landscape of the HLC NFs looked like before European settlement. NRV was briefly introduced as an analysis that will help us better understand “ecosystem integrity,”; that being the conditions of the ecosystem when its dominant ecological characteristics are within the NRV.

The NRV is developed using a large amount of local data, including data on historic climate, species ecology, and disturbance ecology. The key criteria used to identify key ecosystem characteristics are composition, structure, function, and connectivity. NRV modeling is now underway and it will be completed this fall. A public meeting will be held in the fall to share the NRV modeling results.

### ***Summary of Public Comment Received***

Workshop participants shared a wide variety of issues and concerns about the current and future state of the HLC NFs, and participants in every community expressed interest in a number of general resource themes. Notably, however, the areas of emphasis and concern often differed considerably between communities.

Shared areas of resource concerns included:

- Access for recreation
- Road decommissioning
- Weeds
- Forest health
- Timber harvest and fuels management
- Wilderness
- Recreational aviation

There were several issues and concerns that common to all resource considerations:

- Forest Service (FS) cooperation with local, state, federal, and tribal government agencies;
- Flexibility and adaptability in the new forest plan;
- FS funding limitations and capacity to implement the forest plan and projects across resource categories;
- Increasing necessity of partnerships and collaboration with other interests; and

- Forest Service enforcement of regulations for recreational activities, weed management, etc.

***“Need to Change” Community Conversation Workshops Synopsis by Location***

This summary captures what was said at the ten community workshops and does not represent the views of all citizens, the HLC, or the University of Montana. Rather, it reflects the specific issues and concerns of those who participated in the workshops. Some of the issues discussed at the workshops are outside the scope of the HLC forest plan revision process. In those instances, participants’ interests and concerns have been shared with the appropriate Forest Service specialist.

<b>Location &amp; Date</b>	<b>Number in Attendance</b>	<b>Key Issues</b>
<b>Stanford, MT</b> August 10, 2015	20	-Access, loss due to road decommissioning -Emergency services - Enforcement, especially where damages occur -Weeds -Forest health, timber harvest & fuels management. -Airstrips -Wilderness Study Areas (WSA) -Funding for Forest Service (FS) to do its job.
<b>Great Falls, MT</b> August 11, 2015	32	-Weeds -Access for bikes, handicapped, etc. -Multiple use -Airstrips -Watershed resources -Fire -Climate change -Importance of recreation as economic driver
<b>Browning, MT</b> August 12, 2015	10	-Protect Blackfeet Cultural Resources -Protect Badger-Two Medicine -Access -Weeds -Airstrips -Co-management and co-stewardship
<b>Choteau, MT</b> August 13, 2015	14	-Access -Fire/fuels management -Forest health, timber harvest -Airstrips -Funding -Partnerships -Flexibility/adaptability in the new forest plan -Socio-economic data be considered in adaptive management
<b>Augusta, MT</b> August 14, 2015	14	-Weeds -Recreation/multiple use -Wilderness -Airstrips -Funding -Working together -Flexibility, adaptability & monitoring in new forest plan -Communication
<b>White Sulphur Springs, MT</b> August 17, 2015	14	-Weeds - Forest health/logging

Location & Date	Number in Attendance	Key Issues
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Fire/fuels mgmt.</li> <li>-Access</li> <li>-Airstrips</li> <li>-Management: less restrictive and more adaptive</li> <li>-Flexibility/adaptability in new forest plan</li> <li>-Budget/Funding</li> <li>-Agreements with counties</li> <li>-Planning process is too long.</li> </ul>
<b>Harlowton, MT</b> August 17, 2015	36	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Access/road decommissioning</li> <li>-Weeds</li> <li>-Timber harvest</li> <li>-Continued grazing</li> <li>-Airstrips</li> <li>-More local involvement</li> <li>-Work together</li> <li>-Flexibility/adaptability of the new forest plan</li> <li>-Funding</li> </ul>
<b>Townsend, MT</b> August 18, 2015	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Grazing</li> <li>-Weeds</li> <li>-Access/roads</li> <li>-Forest health/timber harvest</li> <li>-Wildlife</li> <li>-Airstrips</li> <li>-Partnerships/coordination</li> <li>-Fire resilient landscapes</li> <li>-Funding</li> <li>-Flexibility/adaptability in the new forest plan</li> <li>-“Respectful” Access</li> <li>-Local management for local priorities</li> </ul>
<b>Helena, MT</b> August 19, 2015	24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Wilderness</li> <li>- Access</li> <li>-Weeds</li> <li>-Mining impacts</li> <li>-Fire/fuels mgmt.</li> <li>-Wildlife</li> <li>-Airstrips</li> <li>-Youth involvement</li> <li>-Maintain FS infrastructure</li> <li>-Connectivity for wildlife management</li> <li>-Coordination with counties in WUI</li> <li>-Protect Native Plants</li> </ul>
<b>Lincoln, MT</b> September 2, 2015	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Wilderness</li> <li>- Access</li> <li>-Weeds</li> <li>-Mineral access</li> <li>-Wildlife</li> <li>-Airstrips</li> </ul>

## Details of Community Workshops

A rich amount of public comment was received in the ten-community conversation workshops held in Stanford, Great Falls, Browning, Choteau, Augusta, White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton, Townsend, Helena, and Lincoln. A summary of discussions in every community follows below.

## ***Workshop Formats***

The general format of each community workshop included the following:

- After signing in, participants were asked to provide and answer to “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” Responses were posted at the front of the room and reviewed and summarized to get a general sense of what motivated people to attend the workshop.
- The FS provided an overview of the plan revision process (see above).
- Participants were given twenty minutes to view eight HLC NFs resource posters which highlighted key findings in the “Preliminary Need to Change” document.
  - Wildfire & Fuel Management
  - Forest Health & Timber Harvest
  - Historic & Cultural Resources
  - Designated Areas (Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, etc.)
  - Recreation Opportunities & Access
  - Terrestrial Wildlife
  - Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds
  - Watershed/Ecosystem Health

The posters summarized the general state of each resource, the present challenges and changes, and what needs to be changed in the new forest plan. Resource specialists were available to answer questions as attendees reviewed each poster’s information.

- The forest resource issues that were of most interest to participants became the subject of group discussions. The number of participants at each workshop determined the number of small group discussions.

## ***Stanford, August 10, 2015***

Participants were welcomed by Judith Basin County commissioners and the Judith-Musselshell District Ranger. Overall, the key issues that dominated the group conversation in Stanford were roads, road decommissioning and access, timber harvest, grazing/rangeland health/weeds, and funding sufficient to accomplish the work (e.g. enforcement of regulations, infrastructure maintenance) that needs to be done in the HLC NFs. There was also curiosity about wilderness and wild & scenic rivers (designated areas), particularly about designations possible in nearby geographic areas.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” participants’ responses included:

- *Having access to roads and public lands and having roads maintained.*
- *Continued utilization of resources—grazing, logging, etc.*
- *Managing the forests for a sustainable future, from grazing to hiking to other resources. Local input is very important.*
- *Include grazing in the plan and start logging again.*
- *FS needs to coordinate more effectively with county services, including fire, EMT, and law enforcement.*

- *Weed management, forest health, and fire mitigation.*
- *Economics of maintaining access, infrastructure, roads.*

### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Decommissioning of roads in recent years which has made access into some areas problematic.*
- *Access for county emergency rescue crews, such as Wilderness Study Areas, where roads are undeveloped and travel is difficult.*

### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

- *There is no logging occurring in area forests, but some felt there should be.*
- *Trees are being killed by insect and disease.*
- *Fuel reduction, which would benefit the local economy, is needed.*
- *Disease, fire suppression, and undergrowth have become significant problems.*
- *Out-of-towners are able to litigate to block timber harvest and other projects.*

### **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

- *Continued grazing on forestlands, as it benefits the local economy.*
- *There needs to be systematic thinking and coordinated effort on weed management, which crosses land-ownership boundaries.*
- *FS was encouraged to observe how ranchlands surrounding the HLC NFs are managed adjacent to 'island mountain ranges.'*

### **Designated Areas**

- *How can we move forward with planning when wilderness decisions have yet to be made by Congress? Forest personnel responded by explaining that part of the forest plan revision process will include evaluation of potential wilderness areas.*
- *Interest in the wild and scenic rivers designation process. Forest personnel described these as specially designated, free-flowing rivers with "outstanding and remarkable value" which flow through forest lands. A 1992 study identified 14 rivers in the HLC NFs and this study is currently being redone to list eligible rivers and identify if anything has changed. The new study is nearing completion and will be posted for public review on the HLC NFs revision web site in the fall.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *Should local emergency services assist people who are injured in remote unimproved areas like WSA's? The new forest plan needs to clarify safety and rescue options, such as who and how emergency services will be provided in such unimproved areas. This relates to road decommissioning and lack of funding. If it could be managed well, the Plan would address funding and staff or describe a mutual aid agreement between the FS and counties."*
- *There is insufficient funding and staff for law enforcement for "the growing number of people and abuses that are occurring on FS land." A suggestion was*

*made that the FS and counties could develop a cooperative agreement to utilize county sheriffs to police local campgrounds on weekends.*

### **Great Falls, August 11, 2015**

Participants were welcomed by a Cascade County Commissioner, the Rocky Mountain District Ranger and the Deputy District Ranger from White Sulphur Springs/Belt Creek.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” responses included:

- *Retirees & generation Y move to an area for public recreational opportunities. These are a key to economic growth in Big Sky country.*
- *Federal lands stay under federal management.*
- *Water—keep & conserve, wildlife—habitat & health, weeds—eradicate & control.*
- *Consider recreational aviation in the new forest plan.*
- *Stop decommissioning roads.*
- *A balance between user groups.*
- *Native plants—restoration, weed control, proper management.*
- *Identifying key watersheds for fisheries.*
- *Continued and increased protection for NF lands with wilderness characteristics.*
- *Log and keep the roads open.*
- *Prepare for and adapt to climate change.*
- *Access for handicapped.*
- *Managing some areas for conservation values.*
- *Decommissioned trails cut off access for search & rescue, etc.*

Workshop participants were then given an opportunity to share their ideas and concerns at greater length in three rounds of small group discussions that each participant selected from among the eight resource posters described above.

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions during the small group discussions: *Describe the state of the resource. What challenges does it face? How healthy is it now? Why is it important? What needs to change in the future?* Participants’ feedback is summarized by resource topic below.

#### **Wildfire and Fuel Management**

Participants described the state and health of resources relative to wildfire and fuel management as follows:

- *The forest looks unhealthy—too many fuels, sick, overgrown.*
- *Inaccessible trails due to fallen, beetle-killed trees.*
- *Litigation is a problem.*
- *Areas logged 30 years ago haven’t been thinned; has set up a tinderbox.*
- *It appears that timber harvest is ruled out as a management tool.*

- *Not much opportunity for timber harvest on the Rocky Mountain Front, though some areas are thick with timber/vegetation—all the dollars go to addressing fires.*

Some participants felt that wildfire and fuel management were important for the following reasons.

- *Fire is a tool.*
- *Create a mosaic of age classes, burned, thinned, etc.*
- *Forest management affects local communities.*

What needs to change in the future?

- *More fuel reduction projects; selective thinning.*
- *Can we spray more and be more aggressive against the mountain pine beetle?*
- *Need an avenue for more small log operators.*
- *Thin old harvest units, but may conflict with lynx and wolverine requirements.*
- *Need to address fire, fuels, and the wildland urban interface (WUI) at the forest plan level. Could identify landscapes, other large areas for desired future conditions—and treatment for fuels, vegetative health, and use of fire.*
- *Can areas be designated to focus on production as a crop?*

### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

Small group participants described the current state of forest health and timber harvest as follows.

- *Forest health is not very good. So much dead timber.*
- *Litigation roadblocks projects and prevents them from getting done.*
- *Currently, timber harvest is almost zero and not necessarily in designated areas.*
- *Timber is dead now—how to get in and get it out while it is still merchantable?*
- *Putting out forest fires in the past has caused a lot of the forest health issues we have today.*
- *Budgets are constrained; can't accomplish fire prevention work.*

Forest health and timber harvest was deemed important by some of the participants because of:

- *Economic issues on the local level—need more timber harvest locally to boost the local economy.*
- *Timber is the primary resource.*

Changes that were suggested in future forest management for forest health were described as follows.

- *Like to see more selective harvests, thinning.*
- *Set primary goals for areas. For example – a timber area would overrule other resources, even if the lynx is in the middle of the area, it can be ignored to get the timber out.*
- *Intermediate maintenance needs to be done.*

Several questions surfaced during this small group discussion that gave the forest resource specialist an opportunity to share more information.

- *How much whitebark pine is there in the HLC NFs?* Response: 2-4%
- *Are the HLC NFs participating in rust resistant whitebark pine?* Response: HLC NFs has seed orchard plus trees.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

Small group participants felt that it was important to educate the public about the value of historic and cultural resources, including building understanding of the associated ethics of preserving these resources.

Suggestions about future changes that need to be made for historic and cultural resources included:

- *Identify more historic and cultural sites to see; provide informative kiosks for them.*
- *Need more interpretations and oral histories to capture important historical stories that may soon be lost.*
- *Create “photo-stops” for tourists to take snapshots of themselves with historical or cultural resources.*
- *Use community advocates to help get information about historic and cultural resources more widely known.*
- *Need easier access to historical information, stories, and histories.*
- *More public presentations and interpretation.*

### **Designated Areas**

Questions and comments regarding ‘Designated Areas’, such as wilderness study areas, wilderness, and wild and scenic rivers, were wide ranging.

Small group participants had the following questions:

- *Is there another designation besides ‘wilderness’ for areas that have important conservation characteristics?* Response: Yes, special areas is one example.
- *How will wilderness study areas (WSAs) be reconsidered?* Response: The new wilderness evaluation process will include a look at existing WSAs.
- *Why are we studying WSAs again when Congress already directed us to do so and we did?* Response: The 2012 Planning Rule and the Final Land Management Planning Directives (FS 1900.12, January 2015) outline the requirements and procedures the FS must follow. Analysis of the WSA areas must be considered under this new direction for Wilderness Evaluation.

Regarding the state of designated areas and the challenges they face, participants observed the following:

- *There is too much public use and grazing on the Smith River.*
- *It seems we are in a perpetual identification process and holding pattern where Congress never acts.*

Small group participants suggested a variety of changes for the future of designated areas.

- *Consider the Middle Fork of the Judith River for wilderness designation.*
- *Need funding to do the work required for designated areas, in addition to fire.*
- *More public meetings around wilderness study areas.*
- *Seek additional protections for roadless areas with regards to motorized recreation and need broader discussions about inventory of roadless areas.*
- *Extend wilderness areas.*
- *Make more designated, protected areas.*
- *Need better grazing management, attention to mineral withdrawals, and identification of key watersheds for restoration and protection.*
- *Need prioritization and different management of different watersheds.*
- *Prioritize rivers for restoration, such as the Middle Fork of the Judith River and the Smith River.*

### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

Public comment received regarding the current state and changes occurring in recreation opportunities and access on the HLC NFs included the following:

- *There are more recreationists than the FS has the budget for.*
- *New technologies have changed the way we recreate, e.g. packing in rafts.*
- *There is an increase in use, trash, and noise in the backcountry.*
- *Users are less courteous than in the past.*
- *Traffic increase in the backcountry, such as the Chinese Wall.*
- *99% of people in the U.S. don't go into wilderness areas.*
- *How do we preserve solitude?*
- *Roads are in dire condition. How does the FS plan on improving the condition of roads?*
- *Do we have to have everything in every place for example - motorized, dog sleds, skiing, etc.*
- *The Jefferson Division is becoming a motorized area and it needs a balance of recreational uses.*
- *Concerned about improved ATV trail systems leading to the Tenderfoot (Taylor Hill) and increasing access and dissecting wildlife habitat and increasing use there.*
- *Deadman to Yogo—the kelly humps were horrible and a deterrent to camp and horse trailers.*
- *Recreation has changed. Forty years ago it was tent camping. Today it is RVs and trailers. Things have become too hardened.*
- *Recreation and access to public land are important economic drivers.*
- *Montana has more public land and less public access.*
- *Private land/private property rights forces everyone into small areas.*
- *Dispersed camping destroys habitat.*
- *Think about 4-wheeler access for permittees.*

Group participants suggested that the following changes occur in future recreation opportunities and access.

- *Need guidelines for generator use.*
- *Increases in patrolling, e.g. use drones for compliance.*
- *Need to be able to clear secondary trails, not just main corridors.*
- *Backcountry airstrips—preserve, maintain, and build them.*
- *Need flexibility in management to address rapid changes. Can't be locked in.*
- *Tie flexibility to monitoring.*
- *The 1872 Mining Law needs to be addressed.*
- *Use of chainsaws in the wilderness.*
- *FS should take care of their own trails and stop using Back Country Horsemen. It takes jobs from people, plus they don't have the knowledge they need to do the job.*
- *Get rid of food storage. Can't hang food high enough. Need to consider all resources: water, wildlife, recreation.*
- *The FS should facilitate cross-country ski trail grooming and related volunteer coordination, and a facility for cross-country ski equipment is needed.*
- *Need to expand snowshoe opportunities, such as those at Silver Crest.*
- *Need as many roads as possible.*
- *There is not a need for more roads; they disrupt habitat for wildlife.*
- *Need access for bikes, handicapped, and ATVs.*
- *The Forest needs to be there for our grandkids.*
- *FS needs to become more aggressive with easements to provide access in the Snowies, in particular. Use special interest groups to achieve access.*
- *Need more opportunities for drive-to camping.*
- *Need better enforcement of off-road use or motorized use on closed trails.*
- *Address cattle grazing in some areas. Potential public health concern.*
- *FS should work with other agencies to get access.*
- *Don't accommodate all uses. Put a cap on some uses. Don't want to see further degradation of quiet recreational opportunities just because of new equipment being developed. Intrusions affect wildlife too.*
- *Jefferson Division needs areas preserved.*
- *Need safe parking areas for winter recreation.*
- *Need to be able to maintain the trails that exist now.*
- *Provide direction for sustainable recreation and trails programs.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife**

Group participants discussing Terrestrial Wildlife observed the following things about the state of wildlife resources and the changes they face.

- *Declining bighorn sheep populations.*
- *Concern about bighorn sheep and domestic sheep interactions.*
- *Concern about budget.*
- *Water quality and issues with too many cows.*
- *Wildlife populations seem to be doing well.*

- *BLM, FS, FWP have done a good job over the last 50 years bringing wildlife populations back.*
- *Possible impacts to wildlife from future technology.*
- *Concerns regarding road management and impacts on wildlife.*

The need for changes that small group participants observed included the following:

- *Protect wildlife habitat and travel and migratory corridors.*
- *Reestablish mountain goats in the Little Belts.*
- *Maintain natural species and balance.*
- *Persistence of wildlife habitat for the long term.*
- *Maintain hunting opportunities.*

### **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

Participants shared the current state and changes being confronted by rangeland resources, including the following:

- *Rangeland health is pretty good in terms of grass production.*
- *Private land overgrazing is providing areas for leafy spurge to start.*
- *Forest staff are observed doing work to maintain grasslands—good thing.*
- *Interagency cooperation with private contributions; people are willing to invest in public lands with their own work.*
- *Knapweed is a concern; early knapweed control is important.*
- *Rangeland health in Highwoods—degraded, too many cows, causing erosion, affecting elk.*
- *Cattle management not as active as in the past.*
- *Water quality issue due to grazing.*
- *Changing forest composition.*
- *There are more weeds on the landscape.*

The needs for change related to grazing, rangelands health, and weeds included the following suggestions:

- *Prioritize weed management. Some are almost impossible to remove.*
- *Need consistent funding.*
- *Don't hurt other programs to benefit the Rocky Mountain Front weed management area.*
- *Need education, including schools and youth engagement.*
- *Use technology to identify and track weeds.*
- *Move cattle around more.*
- *Keep policy decisions made at the local level.*
- *Need to manage timber in the Little Belts.*
- *Checkerboard ownership needs management.*
- *Use fencing to exclude riparian areas.*
- *Greater emphasis on weeds in the new forest plan.*
- *Isolated weed patches should have high priority so they do not become big patches with big costs.*

- *Increase weed management resources on easily spread areas such as roads and waterways.*
- *Increase enforcement of weed control.*

### **Watershed/Ecosystem Health**

The current state of watershed/ecosystem health and challenges that confront them included the following participant observations:

- *Grazing appears to be the largest watershed impact on the HLC NFs. Season-long grazing isn't scientifically defensible.*
- *Sheep Creek and Smith River E-coli and grazing damage, cows are destroying the banks.*
- *Don't realistically have the resources to do adaptive management. The old models do not work.*
- *Smith River water quality impacts Great Falls water treatment plant.*
- *Loss of tree cover by fire—beetles and climate change—causing earlier runoff.*
- *Grazing helps keep grass in proper condition.*

Small group participants suggested the following changes for the future.

- *The new plan needs to do a better job of directing grazing management and responding to problems. Need real monitoring and response in remote areas.*
- *Need more accountability of grazing permittees.*
- *The forest plan process needs to recognize whether they have the capacity to do proper resource protection management.*
- *Technology such as cellphone geo-stamping of photos could help in grazing management.*
- *Forestland needs to be refuge habitats, increase resiliency to climate change to reduce biodiversity loss.*
- *Consider water quality and climate change as very important issues to address in planning.*
- *One use shouldn't overwhelm other uses.*
- *Water is the new gold. Bring it front and center. Quantity and quality.*
- *Address invasive species.*
- *Recognize water temperature issues and earlier runoff in the planning process.*
- *Water/soils/aquatics should trump everything. These are most important to preserve.*
- *Leave naturally functioning water flow in streams.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *Need to enhance/simplify how people are kept informed on the many FS projects and issues.*
- *This process needs to be clear with specific outcomes and deadlines that ensure this is not just another set of meetings.*
- *To keep everyone on the same page during the follow-up discussions, there is a need to work from common maps that show existing conditions and what is being proposed. Issues and/or proposed actions like prescribed burns, past*

*fires, thinning, and wildlife habitat improvements should be illustrated through the use of overlays. That way we can see the big picture in relation to specific projects.*

### ***Browning, August 12, 2015***

The Blackfeet Tribal Business Council Chairman and the Rocky Mountain District Ranger welcomed participants to the community workshop at Blackfeet Tribal Community College. The Chairman emphasized two important considerations for the tribe: their reserve treaty rights to the Badger-Two Medicine and tribal consultation with the Federal Government. He also spoke of the expansion of the buffalo hunt, which is important to the tribe culturally and economically. He said that the Blackfeet Tribe wants to be involved in the new forest planning process and that the new forest plan should include best practices and sustainability. The Tribe hopes for a “living plan” that takes changes on a “*going forward basis, with constant renewal, consideration of all resources, species and interests and no drilling.*”

When asked “What Matters Most to you About the Future of the HLC NFs?” participants responded:

- *Protect Blackfeet cultural resources.*
- *Preservation of the pristine nature of the HLC NFs for future generations.*
- *To work together to protect the cultural and ecological integrity of the Badger-Two Medicine (and other wildlands).*
- *Protect the Badger-Two Medicine from oil and gas drilling.*
- *Cultural recognition of the Badger-Two Medicine.*
- *Maintain and advance connectivity for grizzly bears between the Northern Continental Divide Ecosystem and Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.*
- *Trails and airstrips.*
- *Weed management.*

Specifically, the issues and concerns that were foremost in the minds of the participants at the Browning public workshop were historic and cultural resources, designated areas, weeds, and recreation access. The following public comments were received regarding these subjects.

#### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

- *There was an interest in comanagement/costewardship.*
- *Awareness of these resources has been growing over past 30 years.*
- *Tipi rings/ sites to identify and preserve.*
- *Mining/historic operations.*
- *Grazing bison is a traditional Blackfeet use.*

#### **Designated Areas/Wilderness**

Participants expressed interest in learning more about wild & scenic rivers designation. FS described the process currently underway. It was noted that all of the rivers in the Badger-Two Medicine were determined eligible.

There was also considerable participant interest in the wilderness evaluation process. Participants voiced the hope that the HLC NFs will look at the Badger-Two Medicine as possible wilderness or, perhaps, be considered for another type of designation, such as special area, special interest area or conservation management area. Regardless, participants appeared to share an interest in retaining the Badger-Two Medicine as wild lands along with protecting Blackfeet Treaty Rights (and traditional uses) in the area.

Participants recommended that the FS be familiar with the work of Martin Nie at the University of Montana and John Weaver with the Wildlife Conservation Society.

### **Weeds**

Participants observed there has been a significant increase in weeds since the 1986 Forest Plan was written. FS personnel briefly described the systematic approach that will be taken under the new “Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act Invasive Plant Management Strategy” which was released for public review and comment on August 4, 2015. This strategy will guide planning and management of future invasive plants in the Rocky Mountain Ranger District.

Participants then shared their perspectives regarding weed management. Their comments included the following.

- *Address noxious weeds. Focus on certain areas; contain others.*
- *View noxious weeds as a symptom, not a cause.*
- *Examine vectors—including motorized use, etc.*
- *Do we need more Best Management Practices (BMPs) to limit weeds? Specifically on ATVs? In plan components, maybe BMPs and preventative measures.*
- *Challenge of resourcing outside the FS to implement plans.*
- *Funding and partnerships will become more important in today's funding environment.*

The FS noted that by using the weed strategy, the FS would be looking at ways to be creative and make weed projects appealing to outside funding sources.

The District Ranger spoke directly to the need for a major change in the way we manage weeds, saying, “There are areas we need to focus on to minimize the spread via vectors and other areas we need to learn to live with the weeds.”

### **Recreation Access**

Workshop participants also discussed recreation access, making the following points:

- Observed trends include a growing number of motorized uses, particularly larger recreational vehicles. Additionally, increased day use and the amount of dispersed recreation is also a trend. Alternatively, another commenter noted: “*No one hikes anymore.*”

- Access to forests and resources is needed—roads, trails and airstrips. Two airstrips were singled out for mention regarding maintenance and protection: the Gates Park Airstrip established in 1938 and the Benchmark Airstrip, established in 1968.
- Sharpen the look and feel of trailheads, such as Schaeffer Meadows in the wilderness; “internal trailhead”.

Participants and the FS discussed the need to get creative in how we use areas for recreation, and mention was made of one potential tool for doing this: mapping of the “Recreation Opportunity Spectrum” with rules for what types of recreation will be allowed in what locations.

### ***Choteau, August 13, 2015***

The Rocky Mountain District Ranger welcomed participants to the Choteau community workshop. Key topics highlighted by workshop participants included: grazing and weeds, recreation opportunities and access, wildfire and fuel management, forest health and timber harvest, and mining.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” participants responded with the following:

- *Healthy forests, multi-use, recreation.*
- *Silence, darkness at night to see the stars.*
- *Fires.*
- *Recognizing the cultural and ecological values of the Badger-Two Medicine.*
- *Protecting lands with wilderness value.*
- *Aviation access to dispersed recreational areas in all classes of environment.*
- *That the Forests continue to belong to the Federal Government.*
- *Maintaining the integrity of forest and land ecosystems with regard to changing climate conditions.*

Two small group discussions were convened to allow participants to share their thoughts and suggestions, particularly about current resource conditions, challenges to resources, and what needs to change in the new forest plan.

### **Weed Management**

One group was provided with a brief description of the *Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act Invasive Plant Management Strategy*, which was released August 4, 2015 for public review and comment. On December 19, 2014, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015 (H.R. 3979 113th Cong. [2014]) was enacted after being signed by the President. Section 3065 of H.R. 3979 (commonly referred to as the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act), contains provisions requiring the Secretary of Agriculture to prepare a comprehensive management strategy for preventing, controlling and eradicating noxious weeds in the district.

The Rocky Mountain Ranger District prepared the Invasive Plant Management Strategy to guide the planning of future invasive plant management activities on the District and meet the requirements contained within H.R. 3979. The aim is to be strategic and systematic about addressing the weed problems on the Front, as they recognize no boundaries between private and public lands. The document includes a monitoring plan and a strategy for obtaining additional resources to combat weeds. It also contains a number of tools, such as an Invasive Plant Management Calendar and Decision Analysis Worksheets.

A question was raised about the weed strategy: How will the Strategy be integrated into the new forest plan? The FS responded that they are two separate processes. The Plan will have component systems and include an adaptive approach so there may be an opportunity to incorporate the Strategy as guidance.

### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

Current observations regarding recreation opportunities and access included the following:

- *People are working hard to keep forests and trails open to the public.*
- *There is an increase in activity and more diversity in uses/users in certain areas of the backcountry.*
- *Four-wheelers use is often concentrated.*

What has changed? Small group participants noted the following changes.

- *Technology - for example, packable rafts.*
- *Visitor use in the Bob Marshall has changed. There has been a significant decrease in camps in the backcountry, perhaps due to generational transitions (upcoming generations are not using it like their grandparents and parents). Also, past crowding may have helped to discourage uses by some user groups.*
- *There is more backcountry skiing and snowmobile use than in the past.*
- *Outfitting has changed to shorter trips into the backcountry.*
- *Hunting numbers have decreased, except bow hunting numbers have increased.*
- *Intensive use occurs now in corridors near trailheads.*
- *There is increasing use of the backcountry for skiing and snowmobiling, which suggests the need for management tools to address potential liability issues.*
- *Enforcement and management is as important as planning.*
- *Partner groups have been helpful in maintaining trails and enforcing management directives. For example, the Montana Conservation Corps has been a good partner.*

What needs to change?

- *The new plan needs to build in adaptability, which is needed to contend with future changes and trends in recreation.*
- *The amount of dispersed recreation, e.g. hunting camps, needs to be addressed.*
- *Ski areas are lumped in with other recreational uses in the old forest plan and they ought to be treated differently. The new plan needs to identify places like*

*ski areas' permit boundaries, where changes will take place that require special management. The new plan needs to not require such intensive environmental analysis for proposed actions in these areas. It needs to be adaptable and flexible and have a streamlined process.*

- *We should consider implementing some kind of best practices/user guidelines for backcountry use.*
- *Maintain active lookouts and maintain/expand airstrips.*
- *Budgeting should include consideration of a fee system based on various uses and services.*

### **Wildfire and Fuel Management**

Fire management was a concern and discussion of it revealed differing viewpoints regarding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of current fire suppression approaches.

- *Fire costs are too high. Suppress it all and log instead.*
- *The "let it burn" policy in the Bob Marshall Wilderness is not a good one.*
- *The FS has been cooperating with other entities on fire suppression and communication has improved.*
- *Current fire suppression tactics and more strategic management is a good thing.*
- *Fire challenges the budget and the human capacity for all forest resources.*
- *The new plan should keep budget needs for fire suppression into account.*

A question arose regarding how the forest plan guides decision-making on fire management? Response: The plan provides guidance and components such as "Desired Future Conditions" and guidelines and standards for more site-specific management activities.

### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

- *Use timber, don't burn it.*
- *There is concern about forest health and dead trees in roadless areas and what this means in terms of safety as well as potential economic benefit from removing dead trees.*

### **Watershed/Ecosystem Health**

- *The old plan doesn't sufficiently address the impacts of mining on forest resources.*
- *There is new technology being used in mining practices that needs to be recognized and addressed in the new forest plan.*

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

- *The FS could do more to build awareness and recognition of the resources and cultural/historical heritage of the forest through additional education and outreach.*

## **Issues Common to all Resources**

Several issues raised included: funding for enforcement and management, partnerships, new technology for safety and compliance, flexibility and adaptability in the new forest plan, and the desire that social and economic data and trends be included in any adaptive management approach.

## **Augusta, August 14, 2015**

A Lewis and Clark County Commissioner and the Rocky Mountain District Ranger welcomed workshop participants. The topics that were prominent in the Augusta discussion were invasive weeds, recreation/multiple use, wilderness, and wildlife.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” participants responses included the following:

- *Weed control, knapweed.*
- *Maintaining the Rocky Mountain Front as it is, with clean water, lots of wild country for the wildlife and humans.*
- *Planning for change.*
- *Catastrophic fire.*

Three questions were asked at the outset of the group discussion: *Describe the state of the resource. What challenges does it face? What needs to change in the future?* Participants’ feedback is summarized by resource topic below.

## **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

Weeds were the primary issues of concern for a number of the Augusta workshop participants.

- *Insufficient and ineffective weed management.*
- *Funding sufficient to accomplish adequate weed management, weeds on trails, and motorized ORVs as vectors.*
- *One landowner noted he had some success fighting knapweed in Norwegian Gulch, saying: “without the help of the FS, the battle would have been lost.”*
- *There needs to be more work done to combat weeds in grazing allotments.*
- *It’s important to recruit more members of the public to help combat weeds, as they are a shared problem.*

## **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Trails aren’t kept up.*
- *Importance of including preservation, maintenance, and building of backcountry airstrips, such as the one at Russian Flat.*
- *Multiple uses needs to be continued, but they shouldn’t tear up FS lands.*

## **Wilderness and Terrestrial Wildlife**

- *The importance of undisturbed blocks of land for ecosystem integrity and wildlife.*
- *Encroachment of ORVs isn’t good and that wilderness areas shouldn’t be diminished or depleted.*

- *Wildlife is concentrated along the Rocky Mountain Front, rather than in the wilderness.*

### **Issues Common to all Resources**

Common issues included:

- *Funding sufficient for the FS to do its job.*
- *Enforcement.*
- *Flexibility, monitoring and adaptability in the new forest plan.*
- *Communication.*
- *The importance of working together.*

There appeared to be a shared concern about the impacts budget cuts had had on the FS ability to do its work—weed control, enforcement, etc. To illustrate, FS staff described reductions in the Rocky Mountain District’s wilderness budget from \$128,000 five years ago to \$63,000 today. Participants felt that the public needs to be educated about the effects such cuts have on FS management activities.

The question of funding sufficient to fully implement the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act was also raised. FS staff responded saying that the necessary funding request was submitted to Montana’s Congressional Delegation and proponents have also contributed monies to support the Heritage Act.

### ***Harlowton, August 17, 2015***

County Commissioners from Wheatland and the Judith-Musselshell District Ranger welcomed the community. The key issues that motivated people to attend were access and roads, weeds and natural resource use (timber harvest, grazing, hunting, fishing, etc.) The conversation was linked by video teleconferencing to the workshop occurring at the same time in White Sulphur Springs.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” participants’ responses included:

- *Access for multiple uses, including ORV use, hunting/game retrieval, fishing, firewood.*
- *Weed control. We do not want to look like the western part of Montana.*
- *Allow more timber sales for logging.*
- *Keep grazing permits.*
- *Lack of maintenance of FS infrastructure.*
- *More local government representation to have our issues heard.*
- *The FS should get back to taking care of the land—timber harvest, weeds, and road and trail maintenance.*
- *The public needs to be able to utilize the natural resources and land without being limited to very small areas of it.*
- *Providing natural resources for our country’s wood products needs and for local logging and milling industries.*

Participants asked what the Wild and Scenic Rivers (WSR) designation means and whether or not the President could designate Wilderness Areas. The FS responded, saying that only Congress can designate Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness areas. The first step in the WSR process is determining eligibility and that step is nearing completion on the HLC NFs. The FS noted that WSR status only pertains to rivers through federal lands and that the FS can recommend wilderness areas, but only Congress can designate them.

Group discussion allowed participants the opportunity to share their observations and suggestions at greater length regarding the state of forest resources, what they see is changing and what needs to change in the new forest plan. The following resource areas were the focus of the public comments received:

### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Poor maintenance; losing access due to road restrictions and road closures.*
- *Montana public needs more say and more access.*
- *More loop trails.*

### **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

- *Continue grazing permits.*
- *Grazing is the number one priority. Responsible grazing is critical for weeds, water quality, etc.*
- *Weeds need to be addressed.*

### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

- *Concerned about forest health, dying, dead trees and threat of fires.*
- *Timber used to be 'king.' Roads were better then, weeds were taken care of and the timber money took care of lots of things.*
- *Identify areas for small scale projects.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *More local involvement; learn from successful local initiatives like the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act and duplicate them elsewhere.*
- *Work together, talk the same language, and monitor the same way.*
- *Flexibility and adaptability is needed.*
- *Lack of funding and insufficient FS personnel.*

### ***White Sulphur Springs, August 17, 2015***

A County Commissioner from Meagher County and the White Sulphur Springs/Belt Creek District Ranger welcomed the public to the workshop. The topics that concerned participants most were: weeds; forest health, logging and timber sales; wildfire and fuels management; recreation opportunities and access; and wildlife.

When asked "What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?" participants' responses included:

- *Total contribution to the economy of the community.*
- *The ability for the FS to manage the forest vegetation in a timely manner at a scale that will make a difference.*
- *Adequate rangeland use for all parties.*
- *Manage some lands for their wilderness, wildlife and historic values.*
- *Access, management for multiple use.*
- *Logging, noxious weeds, grazing.*
- *Road management and repair.*
- *More consideration to address emerging recreation opportunities. Specifically areas to land aircraft.*
- *Continued access for aircraft. Don't need a parking lot. In pilot's viewpoint, their recreational opportunity is flying to dispersed recreation areas.*

Group discussion allowed participants the opportunity to share their observations and suggestions at greater length regarding the state of forest resources, what they see is changing and what needs to change in the new forest plan. The following resource areas were the focus of the public comments received:

#### **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

- Concern for weeds and weed management.
- The impacts that weeds in forests can have on private lands were cause for concern.
- How permittees will be treated in the new forest plan.

#### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

A variety of concerns were expressed regarding forest health. These included the following:

- *There needs to be a critical discussion about logging and timber sales, including an analysis of their economic benefits and costs as well as their ecological consequences.*
- *In some parts of the forest, 85% of the standing trees are now dead, creating a hazard in the Wildland Urban Interface and around certain cabins.*
- *Would like to see more timber harvest projects like the 'new' one, recently approved (ex: Miller-Bingham project).*
- *The forests of the future should look healthy and green like private lands where dead trees have been removed.*
- *More can be done to work with the private sector and citizens on wood permits in areas especially hard hit by beetle kill and other diseases.*

#### **Wildfire and Fuel Management**

- *Fires are occurring more often and the fire season is longer than it used to be*
- *Standing dead trees need to be harvested to minimize fire risk.*
- *Fire should be used as a tool throughout the new forest plan.*

#### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Some forest users activities are negatively impacting permittees.*

- *Desire for continued access to airstrips and partnerships with the Recreational Aviation Federation.*
- *There is increasing traffic to the Smith River and maintaining the road is nearly impossible.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife**

One citizen observed that there is a shift in elk habitat and behavior. They seem to be moving off public lands and spending more time on private lands.

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

Interest in the new forest plan generated a number of comments from the workshop participants. Forest management, today and in the future, was also a recurring concern including prioritization of funding. Comments included the following:

- *The planning process takes too much time and responses are needed in shorter time periods than planning allows.*
- *The plan has to be written with the budget and budget constraints in mind.*
- *The plan should prioritize valued areas based on risk analysis (e.g. protecting homes and structures in the WUI and critical municipal watersheds.)*
- *Management actions should be forward looking.*
- *Existing management practices are too restrictive and don't allow for common sense solutions. Management sideboards don't recognize a wet spring or new technologies. E.g. there was tall grass after a wet spring this year, but cows were not allowed to graze due to fire concern.*
- *Adaptive management needs to be implemented.*
- *The new plan should have an end date so we don't have to wait another 30 years for another plan (e.g. another forest plan must be adopted every 15 years).*
- *Can effective management, such as that in the Elkhorn Mountains, be replicated elsewhere?*
- *Road management agreements with counties should be revisited and reconsidered, as there are mutual benefits.*
- *There is a need to ask what we should be providing and prioritize those opportunities given resource and capacity constraints.*
- *There needs to be more flexibility and adaptability in the new forest plan.*

### **Townsend, August 18, 2015**

A Broadwater County Commissioner and the Townsend District Ranger welcomed the public to the workshop. Recurring resource themes heard most were about continuing cattle grazing; weeds; forest health and timber harvest; access; and the poor state of FS roads. A strong voice was also heard for sustaining a “fire resilient” landscape, creating a forest plan that is flexible and adaptable and funding sufficient to address concerns on the ground.

Participants' responses to “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” included the following:

- *Cattle will continue to graze on the forestlands.*
- *Forest values need to be continued and restored to historic conditions.*
- *Wildlife values need to be maintained while respecting grazing and recreational values.*
- *That the HLC NFs continue to exist and function.*
- *Getting productive work done to restore our fire resilient landscapes.*
- *Rangeland, weeds, timber, wildlife.*
- *The ability and willingness of the Forest Service to cooperate with local groups (i.e. counties, watershed groups, grazing associations, conservation districts)*
- *Local management with local priorities.*
- *Management for multiple use.*
- *A revised approach for any future decommissioned roads.*
- *Continued strong partnerships.*
- *Private in-holdings and rights of private property owners.*
- *FS needs to take a more active approach to local water rights.*
- *Minerals privileges have been diminished in roadless areas.*

Group discussion allowed participants the opportunity to share their observations and suggestions at greater length regarding the state of forest resources, what they see is changing and what needs to change in the new forest plan. The following resource areas were the focus of the public comments received:

#### **Grazing/Rangeland Health/Weeds**

- *From a permittee: Rangeland is better than it has ever been. The FS has given him leeway and worked well with him.*
- *The weeds on decommissioned roads are out of hand.*
- *There are dollars available to decommission roads, but not for weed management. Can't dollars be shuffled?*
- *Road decommissioning is especially problematic for permittees who have infrastructure (e.g. springs, fences, salts) to maintain.*
- *The Elkhorn Working Group and the Elkhorn Restoration Committee have done good jobs and have earned the FS' respect.*
- *Weed control needs to become a major priority especially with the decommissioning of roads.*

#### **Forest Health and Timber Harvest**

- *Forest health is one of Broadwater Conservation District's top issues.*
- *Timber has gone from red to grey and it is now falling down.*

#### **Wildfire and Fuel Management**

- *Fire will be the driving tool in the new plan, i.e. restoring landscapes to a fire resilient character.*

#### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Road decommissioning has made some roads impossible to use.*
- *Some road closures are good.*

- *Multiple uses—four wheelers make a mess and have no sense of personal responsibility for the lands they use (in contrast to permittees who are issued permits and have to be respectful of the land they use).*
- *Look at road closures more carefully. Needs to be done consistently across different districts/forests.*
- *Aviation needs to be a part of the new plan.*
- *Consider issuing permits to four wheelers and take the permit away if they don't show respect for the landscape.*
- *We need respectful access—start the message with the younger generation.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife**

- *Does wildlife have priority over all else? It appears that way.*
- *Elk hiding cover rules and standards are a source of problems. New ideas regarding elk hiding cover need to be revisited in the new plan.*
- *The new plan needs to make it clear whether or not standards associated with the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy will be implemented outside of grizzly bear recovery zones.*

### **Watershed/Ecosystem Health**

- *There has been great coordination between the FS and the Broadwater Conservation District on hydrology.*
- *Can there be new privileges for mineral development in roadless areas?*  
Response: This is a site specific issues and will not be covered as part of the revision process.
- *Riparian standards need to be revised. Adaptive management is good that takes the situation at hand into consideration.*
- *Sedimentation in Deep Creek and riparian fencing. The Townsend FS crew is respectful and easy to work with. The Deep Creek project is a great example of a local project, locally led that benefits local people and enjoys local support.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *Irritated by “studying things to death” and not getting things done. This seems like contradictory action.*
- *Local management of forests for local priorities.*
- *Local coordinating. The FS ears are shut to local governments.*
- *The way to increase budgets is natural resource development. You can save it to death. Use it and it will renew.*
- *In the new forest plan, be careful what you mean by providing “direction and guidance.” It would be better to deal with resources from a process and evaluation standpoint. Standards tie you down in ways that can end up being inflexible.*
- *Have flexibility in the new plan with laid out processes, not standards.*
- *Need a new plan that can adapt and be flexible. The FS challenge is to have this when required to provide quantitative analysis.*
- *Sustainability—environmental and social—needs to be part of the new plan*

- *Take public input into account.*
- *Partnerships: in the future the FS will be reliant on partnerships and collaborative groups for acquisitions, maintenance, monitoring, etc. This needs to be acknowledged openly in the new plan and the value of this type of support needs to be recognized. It needs to be nurtured and encouraged. The agency may need to openly help some of groups by participating directly in them.*

### ***Helena, August 19, 2015***

A Lewis and Clark County Commissioner, the HLC NF Forest Supervisor and the Helena District Ranger welcomed workshop participants. A wide-ranging number of topics were foremost in participants' minds including, weeds, access, wilderness, wildlife, and fire/fuels management.

When asked "What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?", participants responded with the following:

- *Maintaining wild, quiet places for future generations of people and wildlife.*
- *Soil and water quality.*
- *Recognizing and recommending future wilderness and wild lands*
- *Maximizing long-term future values by maintaining unique landscapes*
- *Setting forest goals to greatly expand youth involvement and work on the HLC NFs.*
- *Preservation of remaining roadless land.*
- *More wilderness and protection of wild landscapes*
- *Access for all users, including motorized*
- *All people listen and understand each other and do what is best for the forests, not what is best for each person.*
- *That it (the HLC NFs) continues to exist and is managed effectively*
- *Investment that the FS has in its existing infrastructure and how to preserve and maintain it.*
- *Management for multiple use.*
- *Public notification for all public meetings in a timely manner.*
- *Do not close any roads or trails.*

Workshop participants were then given an opportunity to share their ideas and concerns at greater length in three rounds of small group discussions that each participant selected from among the eight resource posters described above.

Participants were asked to respond to the following questions during the small group discussions: Describe the state of the resource. What challenges does it face? How healthy is it now? Why is it important? What needs to change in the future? Participants' feedback is summarized by resource topic below.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

- *Would like to see historic/cultural resources preserved and protected from damages.*

- *Need more feet on the ground for these resources.*
- *Balance what to preserve with what to mitigate.*
- *Continue educating youth and place emphasis on resources.*
- *“Continued use” of historic and cultural resources helps with preservation and maintenance.*
- *Collaborate with and involve the public with management and monitoring of historic/cultural resources.*

### **Designated Areas/Wilderness**

- *Differing viewpoints—both for and against further designations, particularly of wilderness, and concerns about loss of access.*
- *Questions about the wilderness designation processes.*
- *Importance of connecting different groups (e.g. youth) with designated areas and benefits from those areas. (e.g. health benefits—mental and physical).*
- *Importance of designated areas for managing FS lands for future generations.*
- *Long range planning is crucial for preserving resources for future generations.*
- *Concerns about public health—physical and mental—and the need to take account of them in the plan, particularly by engaging youth.*
- *Concerns about loss of access and loss of heritage.*
- *Designated wilderness causes loss of access.*
- *Interest in caves as designated areas.*

### **Range/Weeds/Soil/Water/Fish/Minerals**

Small group participants observed some of the following trends and changes:

- *Concerns were expressed about the effects of grazing and mining on waterways*
- *Mining has heavily impacted the Helena NF.*
- *Lack of treatment of weeds on private lands and how they impact neighboring lands.*
- *The future of bonding on road building?*
- *A number of questions were also addressed, including;*
  - *What is the NRV and how does it relate to ecosystem health?*
  - *Why do we see forest products at below market price?*
  - *How will we prioritize which mine impacts to address?*
  - *How do we get and keep people involved?*
  - *What monitoring is being done for groundwater?*

Regarding the new forest plan, the following suggestions were made:

- *Update grazing management for water quality.*
- *Propose a mineral withdraw in the Sheep Creek Area (Little Belts).*
- *Farming/ranching need to be held more accountable for their management.*
- *Want an upfront discussion of the FS's mission and how national policy affects the Forests.*
- *Need to bring everyone along in forest planning and get buy in for it.*
- *Clarify small mining processes in the plan.*

## **Recreation Access**

- *Maintain respected access for all users.*
- *Road maintenance, public safety from hazardous trees.*
- *Seamless across agency boundaries.*
- *Maintain quiet access for all ages and all incomes to provide for mental/physical health.*
- *Improve infrastructure for safety, e.g. improve trailheads for dispersed access.*
- *Learn from the success stories of resource management.*
- *More access for future generations and maintain historical access for veterans, disabled, youth.*
- *Maintain and increase awareness of the effects of dispersed recreation.*
- *Improve education about the why and how of resource management.*
- *Improve enforcement.*
- *Maintain and build backcountry airstrips.*

## **Forest Health, Timber Harvest, Wildfire, and Fuel Management**

Small group participants observed some of the following trends and changes on landscape regarding forest health, timber harvest and wildfire and fuel management.

- *Positive role of fire (ecological role of fire) – use of fire as a tool on the landscape to reduce fuels, restore habitat.*
- *The Mountain Pine Beetle (MPB) epidemic and impact on fire behavior.*
- *Natural process (such as MPB) and we should not to overreact to this epidemic process.*
- *Stewardship logging projects—a positive move and way to balance management of timber and economy—jobs.*
- *Maintenance of timber industry related jobs is important.*
- *Concern over very severe fires that have negative impacts to soils.*
- *Resource concern regarding roads rather than logging.*

The changes participants suggested need to be made in the future include:

- *Emphasis on restoration (post-logging).*
- *Need connectivity of areas for wildlife movement.*
- *Be sure to consider climate change.*
- *Effective fuel treatments, such as fuel projects (“Safety Projects”) along public roads take into and prioritize the safety and need for those projects.*
- *Allow fire on landscape for its natural role in areas that make sense (safety, Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) etc.).*
- *Support the use of fire as a vegetative management tool to minimize severity of fire.*
- *Concern on how to help to potentially minimize litigation on projects through connecting groups/communities with land managers/agencies.*
- *New plan should focus on/address all purposes of timber management, beyond productivity.*
- *Need to work with counties and other entities/officials regarding WUI.*

- *Keep native plant ecosystems healthy.*
- *Advocate for more local (i.e. Ranger Districts) authority for decision-making for on-the ground projects.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife**

- *FWP concerns are around elk security, impacts to grazing, elk habitat, access (regarding FS and private lands).*
- *Travel plans use 30 year-old forest plan to reference for Elk Security and there is concern that that will be outdated if we have a new forest plan without updating the Travel Plan with the new forest plan.*
- *FS Biologists and FWP Biologists should sit down together and talk about best habitat and elk security.*
- *Concerned that some roads are motorized (regarding elk security) and it does affect elk habitat/security.*
- *In initial planning period, get FWP people to get involved.*
- *Concern about wolverine with global warming (wolverine needs cold weather).*
- *Concern about habitat regulation.*
- *Help preserve wildlife habitat now and in the future.*
- *Concern with old growth/vegetative stands, beetle kill dependent species (pine martins, lynx, etc.).*
- *Do we have adequate old growth dependent species mitigations?*
- *See more wildlife sign in the IRA areas. Concern is accounting to maintain habitat with these other pressures. Want to protect these animals and preserve the habitat.*
- *Weed issues affecting wildlife. Keep forage healthy.*
- *Funding for biologists to do this work. Get and use good quality information.*
- *Take a good landscape view.*
- *Elk security cover (for all big game).*
- *New growth (maintaining security cover).*
- *Idea of biological linkages (corridors).*
- *Habitat fragmentation.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *Invest in people and partnerships.*

### ***Lincoln, September 2, 2015***

The Lincoln District Ranger welcomed the community to the workshop. A variety of topics were of interest and concern to the participants including: multiple use, airstrips, wilderness, wildlife, mineral access, and weeds.

When asked “What Matters Most to You about the Future of the HLC NFs?” a few of the participants responded:

- *Multiple Use.*
- *That the planning document must include provisions for identifying potential locations for internal airstrip trailheads in all ROS categories.*

- *That it (National Forest) stays quiet and clean (weed free & clean water) so I can hike, pack (both on foot and with horses), car camp in wild places or developed campgrounds.*
- *Mineral access.*

Resource specific topics raised by the workshop participants included the following.

### **Historic and Cultural Resources**

- *The Lincoln District has a number of special assets, such as the Alice Creek Historical Landscape and the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail.*

### **Designated Areas**

- *Some wilderness areas are keeping people out.*
- *The wildlands in the Lincoln District are special assets.*

### **Recreation Opportunities and Access**

- *Try to tie FS recreation access in to city/county recreation access.*
- *Balance forest health with population onslaught.*
- *Get youth into the forests.*
- *Access to mineral development is a priority.*
- *Preserve, maintain and create “internal trailheads,” recreational airstrips such as those at Benchmark, Lincoln and Russian Flat. These provide access for youth, the handicapped and the elderly.*
- *Recreational access is getting shorter. The trend in recreation is for day users to be in the forests for about 5 hours.*
- *Multiple uses are a good thing, but once you open up an area to it there is no going back.*

### **Terrestrial Wildlife**

- *The 1986 Forest Plan seemed oriented to wildlife and the new plan needs to be more multiple use oriented.*
- *The fish and wildlife in the Lincoln District are all special assets.*
- *New drone technologies will harass wildlife and have an adverse impact.*

### **Weeds**

- *Weeds are increasing and what can be done about them?*

### **Watershed/Ecosystem Health/Minerals**

- *Mineral access should be a priority in the new forest plan. The mining industry is very localized and minerals need to be developed where they exist.*
- *The new forest plan could be organized around a single organizing principle, such as water quality and water quantity.*

### **Issues Common to All Resources**

- *The new forest plan should include local input and local vision as much as possible.*
- *What is the unique role of the National Forest?*

- *The health benefits of nature/being outdoors.*
- *Partnerships.*
- *Flexibility and adaptability in the new plan.*