



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Service

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Hoosier NF Highlights

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Ensuring the Forest Stays on Track



By Judi Perez, Forest Planning and Public Affairs Officer

When the Hoosier National Forest implements resource management projects the staff establishes objectives and constraints. But once we complete the project how do we know if what we intended to happen really worked or if you got some unintended or perhaps undesirable outcomes? Monitoring.

Monitoring the outcomes of a project after completion answers a lot of questions. Did we get the outcome that we intended? Did something unexpected result? Do we need to adjust the management? Are there other steps to take to reach the goal?

Monitoring often starts while a project is on-going. Forest personnel assure that limited resource impacts occur while the project is being completed. This includes making sure that soil fencing is in place to reduce erosion into waterways; providing protection to heritage sites or habitats to limit impacts; and assuring that trees that are not supposed to be removed are not damaged.

Project level monitoring tells us what is happening at a specific site level and helps us adjust individual treatments to achieve outcomes. Higher level monitoring is done to assure that we are meeting broad-scale goals that are found in the Forest Plan. This type of monitoring generally shows landscape level trends and large scale changes.

This large scale monitoring is directed in Chapter 4 of the Hoosier Forest Plan. The part of the Plan contains question that are consider resource impacts at various time frames, yearly, every 2 years or even every 10 years. This type of monitoring is intended to show large scale impacts of management and changes that are needed in the overall direction.

As an example, a management goal listed in the Forest Plan seeks to provide for conservation of threatened and endangered species habitat. The associated objective is to maintain, protect, or improve the habitat for threated and endangered species by working toward goals and objectives of Federal recovery plans and management direction in the Forest Plan. But what does that mean?

The Hoosier is home to four endangered species, Fanshell mussel, rough pigtoe pearly mussel, Gray bat, and Indiana bat. Recently the northern long-eared bat was listed as threatened. The mussels live in rivers and in general our actions don't have much direct impact there. However, all three bats species live in and around the Hoosier, so we monitor the impacts of our projects on those and report that information to the Fish and Wildlife Service regularly.

In many cases, we do not know specifically where the bats live, but we know the habitat they need, so when we propose a project that will change the structure of the Forest in some way, biologists assume that these bats are present and consider how the project could impact bat habitat. We also monitor by trapping bats to see what kind are there, where they are, and how many there are. Trapping occurs before and after a project is completed so we can see what direct effect the project might have had on the bats that are using the area. This can tell us many things; among them did the project reduce use in the area or perhaps did use increase. Often if the project involved creating more open flight conditions or added a water feature, use will increase in that area.

Monitoring is an important component to managing ecosystems. The Hoosier is currently working to update the Forest Monitoring direction related to implementing the Forest Plan. If you would like to have input on that process or need more information about it please contact Judi Perez (japerez@fs.fed.us) at the Hoosier National Forest.

Pictures and Captions:



Preparing water samples to send to lab for testing.



Collecting water samples in the field.



Biologist Steve Harriss monitors Indiana bats with radio transmitters.



Annual monitoring trip looks at boat dock installation and water quality impacts.