

Public Participation Plan

Rio Grande National Forest Forest Plan Revision

Introduction

The Rio Grande National Forest is revising their 1996 forest plan. The revised plan will provide guidance for all resource management activities on the forest. It establishes management standards and guidelines; it describes resource management practices, levels of resource production, people carrying capacities, and the availability and suitability of lands for resource management. This revision process is governed by the national 2012 Planning Rule. The Rio Grande National Forest is the first forest in the Rocky Mountain Region to undertake this effort under the new rule.

This public participation plan lays the ground work for reaching out to, informing and collaborating with the public, tribes, forest permittees, all levels of government, special interest groups and forest service employees for the purpose of revising the Rio Grande National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan). The participation plan may continue to evolve as situations and conditions change. For example, the planning team will do it's best to complete each phase according to the timeline below, but unforeseen challenges may arise that will require changes to the schedule.

Communication Goals

The purpose of this communication plan is to provide a strategic guide for:

- The effective involvement of individuals, groups and communities throughout the plan revision process including the assessment, NEPA, and monitoring phases.
- Keep forest employees informed and involved (as appropriate) throughout the plan revision process.

A truly effective collaborative process gathers the right information from the right people at the right time using the most appropriate methods possible. The information gathered is used to refine the project in a way that ensures the public that their input is valuable. It makes the overall project better. The process supports the idea that public involvement should always be timely, useful, and used.

It is the RGNF's goal to keep the public and employees fully informed about this project throughout the duration of the project. To support this goal, the program will:

- Establish a level of trust and credibility with the public.
- Provide opportunities for members of the public to comment and provide useful data.
- Promote public education and awareness of forest service activities in the local area.

- Identify coordination efforts to involve the public in the NEPA process.
- Inform those persons and agencies that may be interested or affected by providing public notice of NEPA-related public meetings and the availability of environmental documents.
- Identify cooperative agencies to be involved in interagency coordination.
- Promote constructive open dialogue, debate and deliberation among different perspectives.
- Collaborate with local communities to gather information and identify issues to include during the project's decision-making process.
- Communicate key messages regarding the forest plan revision (FPR) and the resulting document that will guide management decisions on the Rio Grande National Forest for the next 15-20 years.
- Provide multiple channels of communication.
- Provide a credible and consistent approach.

Overview of Planning Process and Public Participation

There are three major phases to the plan revision process all of which include public participation.

Phase 1, Assessment, January 2015 – January 2016

Public participation in the assessment phase will provide the opportunity for the public to share its knowledge of existing forest conditions and to identify concerns about trends and perceptions of risks to social, economic, and ecological systems. Public participation during this phase will also support the development of relationships with and among members of the public.

Phase 2, Plan Revision, January 2016 – December 2017

Public participation during the plan revision phase will provide the opportunity for the public to identify the need for change, develop potential plan components, ensure use of the best available science and comment on a proposed plan.

Phase 3, Monitoring, January 2018 - ongoing

Public participation during the monitoring phase will provide the opportunity for the public to provide input on potential questions and indicator's that will comprise the monitoring program; develop a shared sense of ownership; design and carry out multi-party monitoring; learn of other monitoring information available; and improve the monitoring program.

Resources Needed

National Forest Foundation

NFF will assist with all parts of the public participation process for the assessment phase including:

- Development of a public participation strategy.
- Development of a master plan revision email list.
- Conduct stakeholder interviews.
- Maintenance of the MindMixer website.
- Public meeting facilitation and note-taking.
- Send email blasts about upcoming public meetings.

Facilitator

A professional facilitator will assist with public meetings and note-taking during the assessment and plan revision phases. The facilitator will be hired by NFF for the assessment phase.

Udall Foundation

The Udall Foundation will provide a forest plan revision workshop for RGNF employees and conduct stakeholder interviews with regional and national special interest groups.

RGNF personnel

- Forest supervisor and deputy forest supervisor will provide guidance with public participation strategy; participate in public and co-hosted meetings; and assist with communication with a variety legislative, state, agency and special interest group contacts.
- Forest planner and public affairs specialist will develop the public participation strategy; oversee all aspects of the public participation process; participate in public and co-hosted meetings; manage the forest planning webpage; and communicate directly with a variety of legislative, state, agency and special interest group contacts.

Target Audiences

General public

Residents and visitors to the upper Rio Grande, N. New Mexico (especially Chama and Taos), Salida/Poncha Springs, Pagosa Springs, Gunnison, Lake City, Walsenburg.

Engagement and outreach: public meetings, local media, flyers, email, word of mouth and website.

Youth

Today's youth are tomorrow's stewards of the Rio Grande National Forest. Engaging youth in the forest plan revision process develops a sense of ownership and taps into their unique views concerning management of their land.

The best way to reach a diverse population of youth is through the public school system.

Engagement methods: classroom visits and special events, such as Envirothon and the Beaver Creek Youth Camp.

Low income populations

Approximately 37% of San Luis Valley (SLV) households earn less than \$25,000/year. Some within this population rely on natural resources on the Forest for part of their subsistence (e.g., firewood, hunting, fishing, piñon nuts, etc.). Outreach to this group can be more challenging since many do not own computers or smart phones. Flyers posted where people congregate, such as grocery stores, and word of mouth are the most effective methods of outreach.

Engagement and outreach: flyers, word of mouth, public meetings, co-hosted meetings, and information at forest service offices.

Minority populations

Approximately 47% of SLV residents identify themselves as Hispanic and 50% identify themselves as White, non-Hispanic. The local Hispanic population is fluent in English, while many of the Hispanic migrant workers speak only Spanish. The primary uses of the forest by migrant workers are firewood, aspen pole and piñon nut gathering. Firewood and aspen pole gathering require people to visit Forest Service offices to obtain permits.

Engagement and outreach: flyers, email, website, word of mouth, public meetings, co-hosted meetings and information at forest service offices (Spanish and English).

Local/regional/national special interests (local contacts)

There are several local/regional special interest groups that typically receive project mailings from the RGNF. There may be additional groups that express an interest for the forest plan revision. Some of these groups may be of exceptional value to reach out to underrepresented citizens.

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|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| SLV Ecosystem Council | ScCEED |
| Cattlemen’s Assoc. (local) | Trout Unlimited (local) |
| Conejos Clean Water Initiative | San Juan Citizens’ Alliance |
| RWEACT | SLV Wetlands Coalition |
| Rocky Mountain Wild | WildEarth Guardians |

Engagement and outreach: public meetings, co-hosted meetings, website and email.

National special interests

Most national special interest groups don’t track individual project NEPA on the RGNF. National special interest groups will likely follow and possibly participate in the RGNF plan revision since this will be one of the first plan revisions using the 2012 planning rule process.

| | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| International Mountain Biking Assoc. | Conservation Colorado |
| Wilderness Society | CO Woolgrowers Assoc. |
| Center Biological Diversity | CO OHV Coalition |
| The Nature Conservancy | CO Mtn Club |
| Continental Divide Trail Coalition | Defenders of Wildlife |
| Theodore Roosevelt Cons. Partnership | Trout Unlimited |
| Intermountain Forest Association | High County Conservation Advocates |

Engagement and outreach: Email, website, public meetings and co-hosted meeting.

County Government

All of the county governments that are within or adjoin the RGNF are expected to express an interest in participating in the plan revision process. Counties to outreach to and engage include:

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|------------|----------|
| Costilla | Conejos |
| Alamosa | Saguache |
| Rio Grande | Mineral |
| Hinsdale | San Juan |
| Archuleta | |

Engagement and outreach: Email, website, public meetings, county commissioner meetings and co-hosted meetings.

State Government

State Representative Ed Vigil

State Senator Larry Crowther

Engagement and outreach: Email, website and public meetings.

Members of Congress

Cathy Garcia (Sen. Cory Gardner)

Brenda Felmlee (Rep. Scott Tipton)

Charlotte Bobicki (Sen. Michael Bennet)

Engagement and outreach: Email, public meetings and website.

American Indian tribes

Nineteen tribes have active cultural affiliation to the Upper Rio Grande Basin, but Native Americans make up less than 2 percent of the San Luis Valley residents. Collaboration with tribes will be carried out by the Forest's heritage resources program manager.

Engagement and outreach: Email, website and co-hosted meetings.

State and federal agencies

CO Parks and Wildlife

CO Department of Public Health and Environment

CO Division of Reclamation, Mining and Safety

CO State Forest Service

CO State Land Board

CO Department of Transportation

CO Water Conservation Board

CO Division of Water Resources

CO Department of Agriculture

Bureau of Land Management

National Park Service

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Engagement methods: Email, website, public meetings and website.

Internal audiences

Keeping employees informed concerning the forest plan revision is important for a variety of reasons. Many forest employees like to stay informed and will pass information on to families, friends and neighbors. Additionally, some employees who are not directly involved with the planning process may have valuable information and/or suggestions to share. Internal audiences include:

- Rio Grande National Forest employees
- Leadership and specialists on neighboring forests (GMUG, PSICC, Carson, San Juan)
- RO planning, specialists, leadership

- WO planning

Engagement and outreach: Email, conference calls, employee meetings and briefings.

Communications Methods

- Public participation plan – The public participation is an internal communication tool designed to ensure the forest leadership and planning team understand and assist in implementing the public participation action plan. It also provides key messages for communicating with external audiences.
- Briefings for Regional and Washington offices.
- News releases – News releases are emailed to local and regional media, posted on the RGNF website and emailed to agencies, stakeholders and interested public who have signed up to receive them. Emailed news releases may also be forwarded to others by those who receive them.
- Radio interviews – Conducted by local radio stations. This allows for nuanced delivery of information.
- Employee meetings – These meetings will generally be held at the supervisor’s office, but may also occur at other offices. Employee meetings may also use conference call lines and/or VTC.
- Web postings – The RGNF has a webpage dedicated to the forest plan revision. The page contains links to the 2012 Forest Planning Rule, a RGNF plan revision timeline, a public meeting calendar and public meeting notes. The webpage will also contain a link to PALS during the plan revision phase. The webpage will routinely be updated to keep it current.
- Social media
 - MindMixer – This is a social media platform that will be tried out during the assessment phase. It will be administered by both the RGNF and NFF. This site allows for interactive discussions centered on questions posted by NFF. The RGNF public affairs specialist will participate in the online discussions.
 - Twitter – Will be used to provide meeting reminders and other tweets about forest plan revision with links to the RGNF plan revision webpage.
- Congressional staff briefings – Periodic email briefs to local congressional staff. Staff also receives all public email updates.
- County commissioner meetings – District rangers, RGNF planner and public affairs specialist will provide forest plan revision updates at county commissioner meetings. These meetings are also open to the public.
- Stakeholder interviews – A representative group of stakeholders will be interviewed by NFF to provide input on how to best outreach to the public and special interest groups.
- Public meetings – The RGNF will hold up to 20 public meetings spread throughout the San Luis Valley during the assessment phase. These meetings will use a third-party, professional facilitator and will use an inquiry method based on the assessment questions. Public meetings during the draft assessment phase and plan analysis phase will use a combination of informative, inquiry, and consent building facilitation techniques.
- Co-hosted meetings – These are topic-focused meetings organized by counties, agencies and special interests. Counties, agencies and special interest groups are able to get better attendance from like-minded people concerning specific topics. The RGNF is open to participating in co-hosted meetings organized by any group.

- Presentations to youth – The most effective method to reach youth is through in-person when they are captive audiences at school, camp or an event.
- Letters/emails to key contacts – Direct letters/emails to tribes, agencies and stakeholders. Both of these communication methods may also be used by tribes, agencies and stakeholders to provide comments to the RGNF.
- Email – The RGNF will develop a comprehensive public email list to keep people informed of meetings and comment periods, and updated on the latest plan revision happenings. Additionally, comments may be submitted to the RGNF by way of email or postal mail service.
- Word of mouth – One of the most effective systems of communication in rural areas.

Primary Contacts

Erin Minks, Forest Planner, 719-852-6215

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| Participation Method Timeline | Phase* | | |
|--|--------|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| Stakeholder interviews: To gather input on most effective methods and times for public participation. | X | | |
| Public meetings: To share information, provide updates and solicit input. | X | X | X |
| Co-host meetings: To share information, provide updates and solicit input from agencies, local and state government, and special interest groups. | X | X | X |
| RGNF website: To post forest plan revision materials, information, meeting notes, meeting schedules and to solicit input. | X | X | X |
| MindMixer: Website to post information and meeting dates, and for on-line discussions centered on specific questions. | X | | |
| Email blasts: To be used to announce meetings and provide updates on the plan revision process. | X | X | X |
| Briefings: For internal USFS audiences; local, county, state and federal government; and other agencies. | X | X | X |
| Media: To provide updates on the revision process and announce meetings at least 1 ½ weeks in advance. | X | X | X |
| Youth Engagement: Provide information about forest management and the revision process, and solicit input. | X | X | X |
| Other social media: Facebook, Twitter, Talking Points (map based), if appropriate. | X | X | X |

Public Participation Timeline

