

Forest Plan Monitoring Program Transition on the Huron-Manistee National Forest

The new Land and Resources Management Planning regulations (36 CFR 219) published in 2012 changed Forest Plan monitoring program requirements. All units that will not initiate a revision to their Forest Plan prior to May 9, 2016, must update their monitoring programs to meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule (*referred to as monitoring program transition*). This update must occur no later than May 9, 2016. Changes to the monitoring program are considered an administrative change and do not require a Plan Amendment.

Because the Huron-Manistee National Forests will not initiate the process of Forest Plan revision prior to May 9, 2016, we will be making changes to our Forest Plan monitoring program in the upcoming months as part of the required monitoring program transition.

To successfully complete the monitoring program transition, the 2012 Planning Rule (Section 219.9) requires that we identify at least one monitoring question to address the following eight elements:

1. The status of select watershed conditions.
2. The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
3. The status of focal species to assess ecological conditions.
4. The status of a select set of ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern.
5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
7. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
8. The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 USA 1604(g) (3) c)).

The rule also directs that the responsible official ensure planned actions are within the fiscal capability of the Forests. The majority of these elements are already addressed in the Huron-Manistee's National Forests' monitoring program. For any of the eight elements that are not currently being monitored, a new monitoring question will be developed and added to the monitoring matrix found in Chapter 4 of the Forests Plan (http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5442514.pdf).

As the Forests review our existing monitoring program for compliance with the monitoring program transition requirements, we will ensure our current questions maintain relevance and will continue to provide us with meaningful information between now and Forest Plan revision when the entire monitoring program will be reviewed. We anticipate dropping monitoring questions that are no longer relevant, are costly to monitor, or require an expertise and funding level we do not have. We anticipate posting the proposed changes on our website, available for public review and comment by spring of 2016. If you are interested in knowing more, please send us an email at comments-eastern-huron-manistee@fs.fed.us.