



File Code: 1920
Route To: 1940; 1950
Date: February 17, 2016
Subject: 2012 Planning Rule Monitoring Transition- Public Scoping Letter
To: Dear Interested Forest User:

The Kisatchie National Forest is initiating a new process in our forest's monitoring program. While we continue our important partner collaboration to develop and implement projects across the forest, monitoring remains an important component of our annual program of work. Whether our work is achieving desired outcomes, determining the need to adjust our management approaches, or evaluating forest plan direction, having a strong monitoring program is critical to our success.

Forest Service planning regulations guides forest plan monitoring across the Forest Service (36 CFR 219; <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/planningrule/home/>). New planning rules were published in 2012 and changed Forest plan monitoring program requirements. The rule requires that every Forest's monitoring plan be updated by May 9, 2016, to address eight resource items with at least one monitoring question and associated indicator(s) addressing each of the following requirements from 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

- The status of select watershed conditions.
- The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
- The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions.
- The status of a select set of the ecological conditions which 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.
- The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
- Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
- Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including multiple use opportunities.
- The effects of each management system to determine they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).

The Kisatchie National Forest has conducted a review of the monitoring program associated with the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) which was revised in August of 1999. This review was to determine if the existing monitoring program meets the eight requirements listed above, or if there is a need to change the monitoring program. The results of this review can be found on the Forest's website at



<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/kisatchie/landmanagement/planning>. The review identified the need to make the following proposed changes to the monitoring program to meet the requirements found in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5).

Proposed Administrative Changes: The proposed administrative changes to the plan monitoring program are as follows:

- **Proposed Change 1: Monitoring Evaluation Reports**

Monitoring Evaluation Reports will be produced on a biennial schedule. It is anticipated that the first biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report will be available by September 2018. The forest will complete the last annual monitoring evaluation report in September of 2016.

- **Proposed Change 2: Climate Change**

In meeting the requirement to monitor “measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area” (36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vi)), the following monitoring questions and indicators will be added to the Forest’s monitoring program in Table 5-1a. below. These monitoring questions are related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.

| Table 5-1a. Monitoring Plan Climate Change | |
|---|--|
| <i>Broad Scale Monitoring Questions</i> | |
| 1. | How has climate variability changed and how is it projected to change across the region? |
| 2. | How is climate variability and change influencing the ecological, social, and economic conditions and contributions provided by plan areas in the region? |
| 3. | What effects do national forests in the region have on a changing climate? |
| <i>Forest Level Monitoring Question</i> | |
| 4. | Are long and short leaf pine management activities moving toward a reduction in climate related vulnerability by restoring and maintaining a healthy resilient native ecosystem in appropriate management areas? |

Indicators and procedures for broad scale monitoring questions will be addressed and evaluated through the Region 8 Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy, which the Forest will incorporate into the Forest Evaluation Reports. To see the indicators and procedures that will be used at the broader-scale for these monitoring questions, see the Region 8’s Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy at www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning.

Other monitoring indicators and procedures for the forest level currently exist within the monitoring program and provide information to evaluate “other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.” These monitoring questions and their indicators are listed below.

- Objective 1-5, Effectiveness question: Has management resulted in a decrease of susceptibility of southern pine beetle and other pests? Are pest incidents decreasing with applied integrated management?
- Objective 2-1, Effectiveness question: Are management practices designed to restore or maintain the structure, composition, and processes of the four major landscape forest ecosystems and the embedded plant communities within them being implemented?
- Objective 2-3, Effectiveness question: Are habitat conditions for threatened, endangered, sensitive and conservation species improving?
- Objective 6-2, Effectiveness question: Are the natural plant communities being maintained by the prescribed fire regimes?

Indicators and procedures for the forest level monitoring question is addressed in a new task sheet which was developed to show how the new Forest level monitoring question will be addressed. The proposed monitoring task sheet number 85 is available upon request.

- **Proposed Change 3: Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability**

In meeting the requirement to monitor plan contributions to the social, cultural, and economic sustainability of communities, which is a part of monitoring the progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives, including providing multiple use opportunities (36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vii)), the following monitoring questions and indicators will be added to the Forest's monitoring program in Table 5-1b. below. These monitoring questions are related to social, cultural, and economic sustainability.

| Table 5-1b. Monitoring Plan Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability | |
|---|--|
| <i>Broad Scale Monitoring Questions</i> | |
| 1. | What changes are occurring in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the areas influenced by national forests in the region? |
| <i>Forest Level Monitoring Question</i> | |
| 2. | Are the identified contributions to social and economic sustainability in the Forest Plan desired conditions being achieved? |

Indicators and Procedures for this monitoring question will be addressed and evaluated through the Region 8 Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy, which the Forest will incorporate into the Forest Evaluation Reports. To see the indicators and procedures that will be used at the broader-scale for this monitoring question, see the Region 8's Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy at www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning.

Other monitoring indicators and procedures for the forest level currently exist within the monitoring program and provide monitoring information to evaluate social, cultural, and economic sustainability. The Forest provides benefits to the communities by managing renewable resources for ecosystem services. These services contribute and enhance the communities' social, cultural, and economic sustainability. The following monitoring questions

and indicators from the exiting monitoring program in the Forest Plan provide information needed to evaluate ecosystem service benefits that are relevant to plan implementation.

- Existing Objective 2-7, Validation question: Are habitat objectives for selected demand species providing game and fish populations sufficient for quality recreational opportunities?
- Existing Objective 3-1, Implementation question: How does the flow of commodity outputs to local economies and people compare with the Forest Plan projections?
- Existing Objective 3-2, Implementation question: Is the Forest providing for competitive bid the average annual allowable sale quantity it projected for the first decade?
- Existing Objective 3-3, Implementation question: Are parcels being made available for lease according to U.S. ownership and management restrictions? Are applications for minerals exploration and development being processed according to directions and in a timely manner? Are operating plans for exploration of private minerals being reviewed for compliance with existing State and federal laws?
- Existing Objective 3-4, Effectiveness question: Are active allotments meeting the needs of the local demand for forage resources?
- Existing Objective 4-3, Implementation question: How satisfied are our recreation customers? Are recreation resources managed in a manner that is responsive to public recreation needs yet as cost effective as possible, in accordance with the negotiated recreation program of work based on Meaningful Measures standards?
- Existing Objective 5-5, Effectiveness question: Has interpretive services increased measurable public support of Forest Service resource management goals and objectives?

Indicators and procedures for the forest level monitoring question is addressed in a new task sheet which was developed to show how the new Forest level monitoring question will be addressed. The proposed monitoring task sheet number 86 is available upon request.

- **Proposed Change 4: Focal Species**

Another requirement is that the plan monitoring program must include monitoring questions and indicators on the status of a select set of focal species to assess ecological conditions (see 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(iii)). A “focal species” is defined as a “species whose status permits inference to the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs and provides meaningful information regarding the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area” (36 CFR 219.19).

The following Table 5-2a. will be added to the Monitoring Program. This table shows the species that are being identified as “focal species” for the plan’s monitoring program, along with ecological system/ecological conditions that each focal species will represent.

| Table 5-2a. Monitoring Plan Focal Species | |
|---|---|
| <i>Focal Species</i> | <i>Ecological System/Ecological Conditions</i> |
| Longleaf Pine, <i>Pinus palustris</i> | Longleaf pine landscapes community. |
| Shortleaf Pine, <i>Pinus echinata</i> | Shortleaf oak hickory landscape community. |
| Red-cockaded Woodpecker, <i>Picoides borealis</i> | Longleaf pine landscapes community. |

These species were already being monitored in the existing monitoring program and they will continue to be monitored according to the protocols already established. However, the evaluation of the information gathered from the monitoring of these species will now be used within the context of evaluating the integrity of the ecological system the species represents along with the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring those ecological conditions.

The following is a list of the existing species related monitoring questions and indicators that will provide the monitoring information related to these focal species:

- Existing Objective 2-2, Effectiveness question: Are management practices successfully expanding quality habitats for management indicators?
 - Existing Objective 2-2, Validation question: Are the habitat objectives for selected management indicators providing for healthy populations of all existing native and desirable nonnative wildlife, fish, and plants?
 - Existing Objective 2-3, Implementation question: Are management practices designed to protect, improve, and maintain threatened, endangered, sensitive, and conservation species being implemented? Are management strategies designed for Red-cockaded Woodpecker habitat management being implemented within designated habitat management areas?
 - Existing Objective 2-3, Effectiveness question: Are habitat conditions for threatened, endangered, sensitive, and conservation species improving?
 - Existing Objective 2-3, Validation question: Are Red-cockaded Woodpecker and Louisiana pearlshell mussel population trends responding positively to management strategies?
 - Existing Objective 6-2, Implementation question: Are the prescribed fire regimes being applied to all appropriate landscapes as prescribed, to maintain fire-dependent ecosystems?
- **Proposed Change 5: Administrative change for correction of analysis system name.**

During the monitoring program transition evaluation of Goal 1, Objective 1-4, Effectiveness question determined the National Fire Management Analysis System (NFMAS) is no longer in use and has been replaced by Fire Program Analysis (FPA). This analysis program functions similar to the NFMAS and is the current analytical tool used in the fire program. The reference made to NFMAS will be replaced as FPA.

- **Proposed Change 6: Administrative change for correction of analysis system name**

During the monitoring program transition evaluation of Goal 5, Objective 5-1, Implementation question it was determined the Southern Regional Heritage Programmatic Agreements is no longer in use and has been replaced by the Kisatchie National Forest Programmatic Agreement. This agreement functions similar to the Southern Regional agreement and is the current agreement used in the heritage program. The reference made to Southern Regional Heritage Programmatic Agreement will be replaced as Kisatchie National Forest Programmatic Agreement.

Administrative Change Process and Comment Period

The 2012 Planning Rule allows for corrections or adjustments to Forest Plans using a process called “Administrative Changes.” “Administrative changes” as defined by 36 CFR 219.13(c) is “... any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statutory or regulatory requirements, or other content in the plan (219.7(f)).”

Also described in 36 CFR 219.13(c)(1), “a substantive change to the monitoring program may be made only after notice to the public of the intended change and consideration of public comment.” This letter is to notify you of the proposed changes and provide you with the opportunity to comment. Comments should be mailed or emailed to comments-southern-kisatchie@fs.fed.us and will be accepted from February 26 to March 26, 2016.

The action is listed as a proposal on the Kisatchie National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions (SOPA). The SOPA is updated and made available to the public on a quarterly basis. This letter will also be posted on the Kisatchie National Forest land and resources projects website <http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/kisatchie/landmanagement/projects>.

This Administrative Change will become effective upon signature and will be posted online at the Forest’s website link above. Administrative changes are not subject to the objection process (36 CFR 219.50).

Should you have any comments or questions concerning these proposed changes, please contact Elizabeth Hoyt, Forest Planner, at elizabethahoyt@fs.fed.us or 318-473-7154.

Sincerely,

/s/ W.E. Taylor, Jr.

WILLIAM E. TAYLOR, JR.
Forest Supervisor