

# Helena - Lewis and Clark National Forest Plan Revision

**“Draft Desired Conditions” Community Conversations Workshops  
Summary Report**

*February 23, 2016*



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## **Overview**

Ten public workshops were held in communities near the Helena - Lewis and Clark National Forest (HLC) in November 2015. Evening workshops were conducted in Lincoln, Great Falls, Choteau, Townsend, White Sulphur Springs, Harlowton, and Helena; morning meetings were conducted in Browning and Augusta; and an afternoon meeting was held in Stanford. The workshops occurred between November 2 and November 20, 2015. Approximately 240 people participated in the workshops.

Workshop goals were: (1) to share information about the current status of the revision process; (2) to solicit public input and feedback on the current stage of the planning process, to develop desired conditions (DCs) for the forest and its resources; (3) to provide an opportunity for the public to share their ideas and opinions with the forest service and with one another; and 4) to provide information about how to stay involved throughout the planning process.

A general overview of the information shared by the HLC 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, or the University of Montana. Rather, it reflects the specific issues, concerns and DCs of those who participated in the workshops. Some items heard from the public may be out of the scope of the HLC forest plan revision process. These concerns have been captured and passed on to the appropriate Forest Service (FS) 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 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 Forest Plan Revision (FPR) 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. The plan is comprised of various plan components, including DCs, objectives, guidelines, and standards.

### What will not be addressed in Forest Plan Revision?

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

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

The HLC 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 that were held at ten community workshops in late summer of 2015. Copies of the assessment were made available to review during the workshop and were also available online prior to the workshops. The assessment can be found online at the following [link](#).

Following the Assessment, the team prepared a Draft Need to Change document and posted it on the HLC Forest Plan Revision [website](#). The document identifies the need to change the forest plans 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. The Forest held a series of ten community workshops to solicit public input about “what needs to change” from the existing 1986 forest plans. A report of the Need to Change workshops can be found online at the following [link](#).

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

Under the direction of the 2012 Planning Rule, the HLC conducted a wild and scenic rivers eligibility study. All named and free-flowing rivers within the HLC planning area were considered. Wild and scenic rivers are specially designated rivers with outstanding and remarkable value through forest lands. They are free flowing in character. The results are included in the Draft Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Study, which was posted on the website for public review and comment.

The wilderness evaluation is also underway. The HLC posted the Overview of the Wilderness Evaluation Process document to the website. This document lays out the process for identifying and evaluating lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System. Formal and informal public engagement regarding possible wilderness inclusions will take place throughout this process. An inventory of possible areas to be recommended for wilderness was made available for public review and comment, with comments due March 11, 2016.

What's next?

In early 2016, the Forest plan to hold additional public workshops that focus on management areas.

***Summary of Public Comment Received***

Workshop participants shared a wide variety of DCs they would like to see for the future of the HLC. 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.

Commonly heard resource concerns included:

- Maintained and improved access for multiple use recreation
- On the ground weed control
- Wilderness protection
- Recreational aviation access

There were several issues and concerns relevant to all resource considerations:

- Anticipatory, proactive approaches to resource management rather than reactive to crisis;
- FS cooperation with local, state, 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 need for partnerships and collaboration with other interests; and
- FS enforcement of regulations for recreational activities, weed management, etc.

***“Desired Conditions” Community 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.

Location & Date	Number in Attendance	Key Issues
Lincoln, MT November 2, 2015	7	Recreational Aviation Access Recreation Access Conservation easements Lincoln Gulch town site Aspen Campground Economy of small town Collaboration with private landowners for access
Great Falls, MT November 4, 2015	38	Fires and fire management Road decommissioning (for and against) Vegetative conditions and weed management

Location & Date	Number in Attendance	Key Issues
		Healthy forests Healthy watersheds Endangered species management in Ski Areas Mineral extraction and mine restoration Wildlife maintenance and restoration.
<b>Browning, MT</b> November 5, 2015	16	Badger Two Medicine (BTM) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Special protection for Blackfeet cultural values</li> <li>• Manage BTM to protect wilderness values</li> <li>• Weed control</li> <li>• Water quality protection</li> <li>• Maintain protection of sensitive wildlife species</li> </ul>
<b>Choteau, MT</b> November 5, 2015	13	Fires and fire management Trails upkeep and maintenance Weed control Oil and gas leases in the BTM Potential reintroduction of bison Recreational Aviation Access
<b>Augusta, MT</b> November 6, 2015	6	Fire management and self-limiting fires (for and against) Healthy forests Healthy riparian areas Noxious weed control Wildlife health and habitat connectivity Potential bison reintroduction Backcountry airstrips Balance recreation and resource protection Enforcement
<b>Townsend, MT</b> November 17, 2015	20	Weed control Healthy forests Timber harvest Public education Partnerships Motorized access and access for elderly and disabled Open roads
<b>White Sulphur Springs, MT</b> November 18, 2015	7	Public education for more informed forest users Fires and fire management Recreational Access: more not less Timber harvest Weed control Multiple use
<b>Harlowton, MT</b> November 18, 2015	20	More access for recreation Improved weed control Timber harvest for local economic benefit and fire reduction Enforcement Multiple uses
<b>Helena, MT</b> November 19, 2015	95	Recreational access for multiple uses (esp. mountain bikes) Wilderness protection and landscape level resource connectivity Wildlife preservation and protection Expanded public education opportunities Healthy sustainable vegetative communities across all landscapes Improved livestock grazing practices Timber harvest Water quality and riparian habitat protection Wilderness fire management
<b>Stanford, MT</b>	9	Resource utilization—timber harvest

Location & Date	Number in Attendance	Key Issues
November 20, 2015		Recreational access FS coordination with local government Multiple use Preservation of wilderness and historical, cultural values

## Details of Community Workshops

A rich amount of public comment was received in the ten-community conversation workshops. A summary of discussions in every community follows below.

### *Workshop Formats*

The general format of each community workshop included the following:

- Participants were asked to sign in and then asked how they heard about the workshop. Each participant was given a copy of the Draft Desired Conditions document.
- The FS provided an overview of the plan revision process (see above), including a timeline of the process and additional information about plan components (DCs, objectives, standards, guidelines and suitability). In several communities, participants were given a chance to review and discuss with agency personnel five posters that were displayed:
  - 1) the plan revision process and timeline,
  - 2) a map of the geographic areas (GAs),
  - 3) the definition and examples of DCs,
  - 4) the definitions and examples of objectives (OBJ) and standards (STD), and
  - 5) the definitions and examples of guidelines (GDL) and land suitability.
- Participants and agency personnel then began discussing the Draft Desired Conditions document by soliciting participants' suggestions for DCs they would like to see forestwide or in particular GAs of interest. Where there were few attendees, the entire group discussed the DCs as one group. Where there were numerous attendees, they broke into smaller discussion groups. FPR Team members responded to participants' suggestions and answered questions. Participants were encouraged to take the Draft Desired Conditions document home and review it more closely. Public comments were originally due December 15, 2015. However, the comment period was extended to January 15, 2016.
- Information about how to stay involved in the forest plan revision process was then provided, including guidance on how to use the FPR website to comment. Additionally, the Talking Points Collaborative Mapping Tool (TPCMT), available at the FPR website, was described and demonstrated to illustrate how citizens can comment and submit pictures about the Wild and Scenic Rivers eligibility study. Participants were informed that the TPCMT will also soon be available for receiving public comments regarding Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation.

A distinguishing feature of all the community workshops was interactive communication between workshop participants and FS personnel. As participants shared their DCs, FS staff were able to respond, in some cases citing specific places in the Draft Desired Conditions document, and in other cases noting that participant's suggestions would be considered as the DCs are revised when drafting the detailed proposed action.

A summary overview of each of the ten DCs workshops is provided below. Due to the varying numbers of participants at the each workshop, the summary reports vary in format.

### ***Lincoln, November 2, 2015***

Shawn Johnson, Erin Swiader, and Lincoln District Ranger Michael Stansberry introduced themselves and welcomed participants. Then, the members of the FPR team introduced themselves. Following an overview of the FPR process, participants were given time to review the five posters described above and talk with FPR Team members. Thereafter, workshop participants were introduced to the Draft Desired Conditions document as FPR team members discussed the various resource sections.

Next, participants were asked to describe what DCs brought them to the evening meeting. General discussion followed. Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs.

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- There used to be more local outfitters in town. This is no longer the case. Now the outfitters are outsiders.
- Small communities like Lincoln have completely changed. Few here now have jobs. Lincoln has become a retirement community and a welfare community. The economics of rural communities needs to be emphasized more.
- The FS is not good about crossing boundaries to collaborate with the private sector on project activities. For example, there has been inconsistent handling of routes and the FS doesn't ask landowners.
- The FS needs to look farther back than the existing conditions when analyzing forest access patterns.
- The FS needs to differentiate between travel management and access.
- Clarify how more site specific plans and NEPA fit within the Forest Plan. How do strategic plans adopted earlier fit into the revised plan?
- Some of the biggest changes people are seeing are conservation easements, which reflect a societal 'desired condition' to privatize lots of lands near forests (e.g. Blackfoot drainage). How does the Forest Plan address societal choices like this that are being made in an ongoing way?
- Where's the emphasis on outdoor recreation and tourism? The #1 industry on National Forest system (NFS) lands is recreation/tourism.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- More emphasis on the economic sustainability of rural communities.
- More access to forest lands, such as a loop system for all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), biking routes laid out, or routes for firewood cutting.
- Include DCs for better recreation facilities.
- Improve and upgrade the Aspen Grove Campground between Missoula and Great Falls.

Before closing the workshop, Erin Swiader shared the FPR website, showing participants specific resources that have been posted and links to provide direct citizen input on the Draft DC document. The TPCMT was also demonstrated, illustrating how participants can give public comment on the Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Study.

### ***Great Falls, November 4, 2015***

Jane Weber, Cascade County Commissioner, and Robin Strathy, Deputy Forest Supervisor, welcomed workshop participants. Facilitator Shawn Johnson introduced FPR team leader Erin Swiader, and the members of the FPR team introduced themselves. An overview and status update regarding the FPR process was provided, then participants had an opportunity to review the five informational posters described above.

Next, two rounds of small group discussions were held, allowing participants to join in two resource-based conversations. Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs for different resource areas.

### **Vegetation and Fire (including Timber)**

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Need to harvest timber more, rather than lose the resource to wildfires. The forest needs to be more managed, and provide funds via harvest to the county.
- There are more snags now than there used to be, since we don't salvage.
- It's unfair the way carbon is tracked (i.e., carbon emissions from wildfires are considered OK).
- There are more jobs in the fire business now than in timber.
- We need to clearly define the "ecosystem." We should have a "wild forest."
- We need to manage people, not the forest. Global warming is changing things.
- Leave duff etc. around creeks and rivers when doing salvage.
- Removing culverts and roads is a good idea; decommissioning is good. At least close the roads and remove culverts because roads impact streams.
- Roads should just be closed rather than decommissioned, in case they are needed in the future.
- We should not have a minimum level or DC for the amount of timber volume to cut.

- The expanding wildland urban interface (WUI) is an issue; we shouldn't put extra resources in those areas – we need to control human impacts and if people build there they are accepting the risk.
- Recreational leases on NFS lands are problematic.
- FS spends too much \$\$ on fire suppression – prevention actions should be taken to avoid this.
- We should be protecting whitebark pine instead of letting it burn.
- Past clear-cuts created homogeneity. Providing \$\$ should be secondary to ecosystem objectives.
- Existing roads should remain accessible (road decommissioning in Little Belts is not desirable).

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Forests are multi-age class with species diversity allowing natural barriers and helping to limit the size of wildfires and creating vegetative mosaics.
- Timber production helps sustain the local economy.
- Plant species of concern are widespread throughout the HLC and regenerate/relocate as habitats change over time.
- Proactive vegetative treatments create barriers to prevent devastating large-scale fires on vulnerable landscapes on the Forest.
- Designation of areas for timber production should be a primary goal of management.
- Manage national forests as a living forest, with a patchwork of ages.
- Create “timber only” management area.
- Maintain species diversity.

### **Range, Weeds, Watersheds**

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- The FS should ensure adequate bonding for future oil and gas leasing commensurate with reclamation costs. How much say does the FS have?
- Who is responsible for clean up?
- No exploration or leasing permitting for minerals, metals, non-metallic.
- No saleable minerals, sand, gravel, etc.

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- Mineral withdrawals are considered and enacted in valuable watersheds.
- Prioritizing stream management depending on values (fish, water quality, etc.).
- Native westslope cutthroat trout (WCT) are strongly reestablished and thrive in their historic habitats.
- Watersheds are healthy and resilient with well-vegetated, stable stream banks—sedimentation is minimal and even after fire, mitigation measures ensure minimal sediment loads in the streams.
- Healthy forests retain nationally coveted clean air and forest fires are smaller scale and create only short periods of degraded air quality conditions.

- Rangeland conditions are diverse and resistant to weed infestations. Infestations are small and manageable.
- Companies who extract minerals must post bond to completely cover cost of reclamation before extraction.
- Protect, maintain and increase WCT; prevent and eliminate invasive species.
- Preserve riparian watersheds.
- Desired vegetative condition should reflect the natural range of variation (NRV).

## **Wildlife (including Hunting)**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Why are endangered species managed in ski areas?
  - Question generated considerable discussion regarding ongoing lynx management.
- What kind of presence do lynx have in the Little Belts? How widespread are they?
- What areas of the Jefferson Division are most threatened as to wildlife?
- How does management change through the years with the large mammals on the Rocky Mountain Front (RMF)? The Forest Plan lasts for a couple decades or longer. Things change. Can the Forest Plan be amended?
- Why are the Little Belts being managed for lynx when lynx apparently don't frequent the area?
- Want to see grizzly removed from the endangered species list.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Maintain and restore native wildlife species.
- Minimize conflicts between grizzly bears and users of the forest.
- Educate Montana's youth about wildlife and conservation.
- Maximum number of elk, deer, bear, goats, moose, sheep and upland birds and access to harvest the animals.
- Old growth forests.
- Corridors.

During the small group's consideration of DCs regarding wildlife, grizzly bear management was also discussed. FPR Team member Wendy Clark told participants about the Grizzly Bear Conservation Strategy which will ultimately be woven into the Plan. The goal is a sustained grizzly population. One participant reported that grizzly have been sighted in the Little Belts. In light of this possibility, participants suggested that new signage is needed to prevent human-bear encounters.

## **Recreation and Designated Areas**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- One participant said that ski area and lynx critical habitat questions were designed and implemented by agencies.

- The FS appears to want to turn the entire forest into wilderness because it is cheaper to manage.

***Desired Conditions***

- Recreation needs to balance use and protection on a level playing field.

***Browning, November 5, 2015***

Shawn Johnson welcomed participants to the community workshop at Blackfeet Community College and introduced the FPR team leader Erin Swiader. FPR team members introduced themselves. Erin then gave an overview and status update regarding the FPR process. Participants were given time to review the five posters described above.

Those present were then asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years. A variety of DCs for the Badger Two Medicine (BTM) area were of particular concern to most of the workshop participants.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs for different resource areas.

**Badger Two Medicine (BTM)**

***Desired Conditions***

- Conservation-oriented management (of wildland ecosystem values and of cultural values).
- Co-management with oversight between the Blackfeet Tribe and the FS (expressed by several participants).
- Permanent protection in perpetuity. Not wilderness or any other existing designation, but a distinct, unique designation for the BTM that is defined by Blackfeet values. Suggest having a committee to put something together similar to recommended wilderness process. Include Blackfeet treaty reserved rights (timber, fish, wildlife).
- The BTM is characterized by a different set of circumstances (e.g. treaty reserved rights) so it should be treated as a separate unit for management. The landscape needs to be identified properly and its components identified properly. It is special and different.
- Quiet (no motors, no roads, no industry, no oil, gas, logging).
- Weed-free: arrest spread from BTM margins inward.
- Depict a functional landscape—don't pin down too many details of the components. Don't build too small of a 'box' when describing the future (influences of climate, humans, etc.).
- Long-term increased FS personnel presence.
- Establishment in BTM of grizzly bear secure core habitat.
- Recognition of Reserved Rights.
- Protection of sacred sites.

- Permanent full-time Tribal Liaison for the BTM.
- More Blackfeet Forest Service personnel.
- Permanent protection of the BTM under Blackfeet Management.
- Limit roads and motorized access; none in the BTM.
- No motor vehicle access off of established roads; strict enforcement of that condition by law enforcement.
- Aggressive control of noxious weeds—especially spotted knapweed and leafy spurge.
- Continuation of the wild, roadless condition.
- Elimination of cattle grazing leases and associated fences and gradual replacement with free-roaming bison.
- Grazing allotments in the BTM are overgrazed.
- Reclamation and revegetation of roads that are not part of the formal travel plan.
- Maintenance of sensitive and endangered species populations.
- Manage to fully protect the BTM Blackfeet Traditional Cultural District.
- Manage to protect the wilderness values of the BTM.
- Partner with the Blackfeet Tribe and Wildlife Conservation Society to allow reintroduction of bison into the BTM.
- Enact strict habitat protections for grizzly bears in the BTM.
- Manage the area to maintain its wild character and values.
- Keep it nonmotorized except for the current spur roads.
- Manage the area to uphold the Cultural District designation.
- Maintain the headwaters of the Badger and Two Medicine Rivers in such a way that the waters remain clean and can support native fish species.
- Have more marked trails in the BTM; better trail management
  - This winter the Rocky Mountain District is writing a nonmotorized recreation plan and they will be seeking comments about it.
- Fire education.
- Better-marked trails, easier public access.
- Signage in Blackfeet language?
- Map of trails.
- Patrolling, keeping motors out.
- Stronger presence of FS personnel to enforce the travel plan.
- More cooperation of FS with the Blackfeet tribe on lands adjoining forest (e.g. FS ignores tribal elk management).
- No salvage logging—human interventions fail in the long term.
- Find a way to connect with and involve the Blackfeet people in Canada.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs regarding the forest specific to the Rocky Mountain Ranger District. These included the following:

## Range, Weeds, Watersheds

### *Issues and Concerns*

- Coordinated weed management program in the Rocky Mountain District with adjacent area management involvement.
- Steam water quality restoration.
- Restoration and remediation of mine sites
- Cold, connected watersheds with sufficient instream flows
- Carbon sequestration
- Weed/invasive free
- Entire Rocky Mountain Front and HLC weed free
- Concern was shared regarding contained trash can near water. Will the Plan address this?
  - Something that is built right into the ground but is still removable.
  - Something that can contain odor to less likely attract bears.
  - Something sturdy that a bear cannot break or get into.
  - Like an outhouse maybe?
  - Issues with trash can plan
    - Funding.
    - Who is going to empty it?
    - If a bear does happen to break in, it can affect not only the water, but the geological area and habitat.
- Abandoned mine reclamation.
- Implementing riparian conservation strategies.
- What is being done with the six priority watersheds to restore water quality? More important, what isn't being done to restore them?
  - Water is not just a forest issue it is a statewide, national and international issue. Fresh water is scarce and there are few projects worldwide to preserve it and fewer to make sea water drinkable. What can we do to improve this condition?
  - As reported in the draft DC document, in Montana there are 103 watersheds functioning properly; 159 watershed function at risk; 34 watersheds impaired; 55 streams with water quality impaired—looks lie more at risk to me. Something more needs to be done about water and water quality across the forest.
    - What actions are being taken within the plan to reduce water quality pollution?
    - How does recreation affect the water quality and what can we do within the plan to reduce recreational pollution of water quality?
    - What actions can take place within the plan to restore watersheds that are either functioning at risk or are impaired?
- More restoration and revegetation of outdoor recreation vehilce trails.

## **Wildlife (including Hunting)**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Wildlife habitat to sustain healthy populations, not just a big game focus but for all types.
- Endangered species conservation strategies.

## **Recreation & Designated Areas (including Outfitter/Guides)**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Roadless area management wild and untrammled.
- Nonmotorized use.
- Opportunities for primitive recreation.
- Road decommissioning across the HLC.
- Trail restoration.
- More trails established (maintained, marked, maps).
- The introduction in the draft document regarding infrastructure mentions airstrips but there is no desired condition listed for airstrips, specifically.
  - Airstrip maintenance is accomplished through funding and volunteer labor from pilots' associations.
- Alternative methods considered for access and multiple use activities. Need to expand to state DCs under multiple use rule.
- Removing excess roads; improving road conditions.
- Removing fish migration issues.

## ***Choteau, November 5, 2015***

Shawn Johnson welcomed participants to the Choteau community workshop and introduced FPR team leader Erin Swiader. FPR team members introduced themselves. Erin then gave an overview and status update regarding the FPR process. Plan components were described. Participants were given time to review the five posters described above.

Those present were then asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following DCs for different resource areas.

## **Vegetation and Fire**

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Regarding fire policy: use state helicopters. Some fire is inevitable but it is hard to see such extensive and intensive hot fires.
- Less severe intensively hot fires; more actively fight fires in certain places.
- Climate change might cause fire to be uncontrollable.
- Less fire. Limited FS resources are sucked dry annually by fire. All else comes to a halt. The status quo isn't working.

- Build a more fire-resistant landscape.
- Concern: letting fires burn hasn't left the forests healthy. The FS managed fires for 75 years and then pulled the rug out. Forests are burned but not healthy. There is too much emphasis on fire economy. Graze it or harvest timber. Get people on the ground and into the picture. Fire is not the answer, logging is.
- The public has given up on the FS—there is a lack of common sense—we need to put fires out immediately and conduct logging activities.
- Provide ecological integrity.
- Consider that we may have let too much fire in too fast in the RM Range. Are we still in the NRV or have we burned too much?

### **Range, Weeds, Watersheds**

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- Cancel oil & gas leases in the BTM.
- Work on the ground to combat weeds.

### **Wildlife (including Hunting)**

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- Areas to reintroduce wild bison; are there opportunities to do so and work with MTFWP on it? E.g. the BTM where there was historical distribution of bison, there may be opportunity for reintroduction.

### **Recreation & Designated Areas (including Outfitter/Guides)**

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- Work on the ground to maintain trails.
- Loss of trails and access due to downfall of trees that block travel (related to fires). There is not recognition of downfall after fires, which prevent moving cattle into the forest and makes other access difficult.
- Trail maintenance

### **Miscellaneous comments**

- Follow the Rocky Mountain Front Heritage Act Guidelines.
- Partnerships for potential revenue sources.

### ***Augusta, November 6, 2015***

Shawn Johnson and Lewis & Clark County Commissioner Susan Goode Geisse welcomed workshop participants. Shawn introduced FPR team leader Erin Swiader and members of the FPR team introduced themselves. Erin then gave an overview and status update regarding the FPR process. Plan components were described. Participants were given time to review the five posters described above.

Those present were then asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns as well as DCs for different resource areas.

## **Vegetation and Fire (w/Timber)**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- I don't think fires can be self-limiting in this age of climate change, as fires are blowing through now previous burns.
- Leave decision space open for local line officers in regards to fire.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Fires should be self-limiting at the broad scale. However, don't say that fire use will be allowed in areas where it is not possible (i.e., we never actually get a window, as in the Elkhorns when the best window conflicts with hunting season). I.e., don't give false hope/expectations.
- Cool green forests provide abundant canopy for riparian habitat, fish habitat, wildlife refugia and abundant water supply. Forest cover to absorb carbon and combat global warming.
- Water cool, carbon sink—high value for the forest.
- Err on the side of more forest cover when in natural range of variability in face of climate change.
- Need more direct response to fire so there is smaller landscape disturbance

## **Range, Weeds, Watersheds**

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Noxious weeds -- a very high priority in all management areas.
- Noxious weeds a high priority; more boots on the ground.
- The idea of weeds as a focal species may be a viable one.

## **Wildlife (Hunting)**

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Maintain wildlife habitat and connectivity by protecting wild lands and establishing corridors (pleased with what they read in the draft document regarding this.).
- Consider a DC that will leave the door open to reintroduction of bison.

## **Recreation & Designated Areas (w/Outfitter/guides)**

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- The FS may interpret the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (RACR) direction too conservatively – keep in mind that we can implement some activities here.
- Anticipate population growth.
- Anticipate new forms of backcountry use, such as pack rafting.
- Enforcement.
- Take care of the wilderness we have; no more needed.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Consider reopening the Gates Park Airstrip, which was administratively closed after the Wilderness Act was implemented. Would provide an excellent internal trailhead to the wilderness similar to Shafer Meadows in the Great Bear Wilderness. At least don't preclude doing this in the planning document. Be careful not to preclude things in the plan unless absolutely necessary. The future will be very different from the present.
- Support keeping the Benchmark Airstrip open and maintained.
- Find a balance between regulation of recreation and protection of the resource and opportunities for solitude.
- Find a balance between access and regulation that is good for the resources and the recreating public.
  - Discussion of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC) used in the Bob Marshall as possible management tool for other forest areas. Do we need something like this?
  - The challenge is to mesh social tolerance (which is changeable) with resource tolerance.
  - In the Bob Marshall, the LAC is not the numbers of people that are important but, instead, it is important to monitor the social experience of people (i.e. how they relate to one another) and the resource component (i.e. how people relate to the resource). LAC in the Bob is a 9-step process that produces a plan.
- Move wilderness study areas (WSAs) toward wilderness designation; put more effort into getting these designated.
- Enforce travel plans in the WSAs and roadless areas to keep it from getting chipped away at the edges.
- Wilderness provides ample opportunity for traditional recreation and shelter for camping. It seems like fire management became the dominant use during much of the recreational season.
- Recreational values promoted to a higher level than is implemented now.

### ***Townsend, November 17, 2015***

Shawn Johnson and Corey Lewellen, the Townsend District Ranger, welcomed the public to the workshop. Members of the FPR team introduced themselves. Hydrologist Deb Entwistle gave an overview and status update regarding the FPR process. Participants were given time to review the five posters described above.

Those present were then asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular GA over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs.

### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Too much restriction on firewood gatherers; more leniency.

- For economic impact analysis, don't use Implan—need to analyze impacts to small communities.
- Are recreational opportunities being discouraged due to liability concerns? Dead trees are a liability issue now—people can get stranded. This is a safety concern.
- Decommissioning roads can be destructive.
- So many dead trees that are a liability to hikers. Used to be lots of roads open.
- Forests are overgrown—bug kills and fire concerns.
- Used to have a FS that managed the forests. Can't do it any longer. Courts control forest management. Give authority back to the forest.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Weed control in the uplands; bio-control best.
  - Mark areas being bio-controlled to prevent others from 'undoing' it.
- Nice healthy forest, with a mix of grass and trees and vegetation.
- Public awareness of forest health actions and management actions.
  - For example, motorized users are sometimes accused of being in the wrong place; post when chemical spraying has been done.
- More designated, dispersed primitive recreation areas to reduce load on developed recreation sites (camping sites).
- More roads for forest access for physically disabled, low income users and disabled hunters.
- FS should have the flexibility to adapt to changing conditions, new technology and climate change.
- Continued grazing on the forest.
- Aggressively treat weed infestations; not just at campgrounds.
- Conduct large watershed scale restoration to get to sustainable DCs.
- Educate the public about forest etiquette and rules, e.g. cattle are okay and can be beneficial to the landscape.
- Use trees for beneficial purposes, not standing or burning.
- Maintain roads to reduce runoff and erosion.
- Use adaptive management.
- Diverse habitat types, successional stages, diverse wildlife.
- Collaborative work on maintenance in forest; use local expertise in collaboration with the FS on implementation.
- More logging.
- Continuing multiple use, more cleanup of dead trees, logging, firewood projects.
- More fires let burn than put out—can be a tool.
- Continue grazing, including in riparian areas occasionally.
- Increase opportunities for recreation in growth sectors of the economy. For example, ORV sales are trending upwards.
- FS needs to have partnerships.

- Need an entire section in the new Forest Plan regarding getting user groups to sit down and talk to address user disputes and develop cooperative uses. Forest user groups need to work together for the benefit of all.
- Open roads and trails for motorized use. "Access and maintenance of trails."
- More active logging and more open roads.

### ***White Sulphur Springs, November 18, 2015***

Facilitator Mary Ellen Wolfe, Forest Supervisor Bill Avey, and White Sulphur Springs District Ranger Carol Hatfield welcomed the public to the workshop. The team then introduced themselves. After hearing an update on the forest planning process and learning about plan components, participants were given time to review the five posters described above.

Those present were then asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs.

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- There is a lack of infrastructure (such as toilets) to protect resources so users can use the Forest responsibly.
- Get ahead of the curve/trends rather than just being responsive.
- Obliterating roads is not good. Forest health is poor. Hunting is no longer successful because wildlife is leaving FS land for private land.
- The economy of the USA these days is depressed to say the least. More resource production would generate new wealth for the country. New wealth is not created by putting green ink on paper nor employing endless amounts of government bureaucrats.
- A landscape that is useable for all recreational needs.
- Bulls chasing people (grazing animals).
- Overgrazing of national forest areas.
- Realistic advice from USFS local employees to their supervisors, at all levels, to make higher levels aware of improbability of good management due to lack of dollars.

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- More information and public education, especially for new forest users.
  - Educate the public about how to properly camp, hike, etc... Promote outdoor ethics.
  - Educate the public about firewood cutting and leaving tall stumps.
  - Provide maps.
  - Signage.
  - Public needs to understand the FS budget.
- A landscape across the forest that is resilient to wildland fire.

- A landscape in and near the WUI that will modify fire behavior; protect private values and the municipal watershed; and reduce changes to the landscape/resources.
- Most recreational use of the forest occurs within a short distance of existing roads and trailheads. Dispersing this concentrated use will prevent overuse. Additional airstrips, small trailhead-type camping sites, or loop trails can help prevent “loving it to death.”
- Want to see a DC addressing how much the FS spends on fire suppression; needs to be a renewed emphasis on multiple use, thin the forest so we’re not spending over ½ the FS budget on fire suppression.
- Need better access. Maintain and manage access for older people.
- Erosion control on roads after logging.
- User-friendly forests.
- Trails for mountain bikes.
- Renewed emphasis on multiple uses - including more timber sales, grazing, and mineral production.
- Cleanup trash such as that resulting from cattle permittees’ activities (i.e. plastic pipe at springs).
- Weed control.
- Conditions should be managed for the best health of the forest, including a variety of forest species.
- Use of “systems” management on an ongoing basis, to replace “management by panic” after long periods of time (12-15-30+ years)
  - Change the management system for better management of access and roads and consider how it affects wildlife.
- More logging.
- Increased FS presence/law enforcement.
- Erosion control—open roads and road maintenance.
- Don’t decrease existing access opportunities.

### ***Harlowton, November 18, 2015***

Facilitator Mary Ellen Wolfe welcomed the community. The FPR team introduced themselves. After hearing an update on the forest planning process and learning about plan components, participants were asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns, as well as DCs.

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- Less planning, more implementation of plans already developed (projects).
- USDA supports Rural Economic Development—USFS should keep management offices in rural areas. The loss of the Ranger in Harlowton leaves the community with no voice at the FS in Helena.
- Recreation—it’s so crowded, which goes back to access.

- We have a faction of people who are opposed to any use of USFS land. The only thing they know is to sue and take USFS and FWP to court to stop whatever they want. USFS needs to be prepared to defend against these people. They have put a stop to most multiple uses and are working at ending all multiple uses.
- Need \$\$\$ to implement the plan or there is no point.
- No more wilderness or roadless areas; multiple use not no use.
- Maps are too complicated and signage is nonexistent or inconsistent.

### ***Desired Conditions***

- Ecological sustainability of the timber resources through more timber harvest
  - For forest health.
  - Provide economic and resource benefit.
  - Improved roads through timber \$\$.
  - Control of noxious weeds.
  - Better land management; adaptive management.
  - Avoid catastrophic fires.
- Conditions supporting rural recreation and economic survival.
- Access—some areas are literally shut off; better access for elderly; USFS access is very limited; no more road closures.
- Camp, hunt, fish, hike, ATV, firewood, logging, mining, cattle, weed control, access.
- Multiple use is important and appropriate.
- Continued grazing at current levels; do analysis of capability.
- Increased noxious weed control; weeds are a threat to private operations.
- Enforcement of vehicle use to established roads and trails (travel plans) and better signage.
- Need to manage specific areas within geographic areas for DC of range, timber, etc. Not all management areas should be managed to achieve climax vegetation. Management of some areas for a departure from climax is not all bad.
- Management of forest encroachment on range lands (prescribed burns, logging, thinning).
- Little Belts GA—analyze and manage overly dense conifer stands (logging).
- More consistent timber harvest activities on suitable lands. For example: 10-15,000 acres/decade. Need to support the logging industry to keep that tool in the toolbox.
- More frequent road maintenance hopefully financed through timber sales.
- Broader, more integrated objectives for management areas.
- Maintain some nonwilderness and nonmotorized areas.
- Simplify and enforce travel restrictions.
- No more road obliteration.
- Better infrastructure maintenance—roads, trails, campgrounds.

- Project level and planning level on a landscape basis that mimics natural processes. Keep standards at the right scale and context.

### ***Helena, November 19, 2015***

Facilitator Shawn Johnson, Forest Supervisor Bill Avey, and Lewis and Clark County Commissioner Mike Murray welcomed the large group of workshop participants. The FPR team then introduced themselves. After hearing an update on the forest planning process and learning about plan components, participants were asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Because of the large number of participants, including 23 students from the University of Montana, there were many specific DCs expressed by workshop participants. A representative sampling of issues and concerns, as well as those DCs expressed by workshop participants is included below.

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- We have pitted motorized vs. non-motorized but it doesn't need to be that way. When we close roads it becomes exclusive utilization.
- More scientifically based decisions made without political influences.
- In many years of wilderness use, it has become increasingly difficult to navigate the trail system as well as find safe camping areas due to the impact of fire. I understand the "self-limiting" concept, but the loss of trails and camp areas, in particular for saddle and pack stock, is becoming a huge problem and further analysis is needed! Safety of course is an issue.
- Plan for 2 million population in MT in 40 years; population pressure.
- More scientifically based decision-making and much less political influence in decisions on both the state and national levels.
- Adaptable/flexible yet need for clear standards.
- Too much flexibility lends itself to mismanagement.

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- Free-flowing clean water (water quality) and eligibility for Wild and Scenic, access
  - Designate the Smith River wild and scenic.
- Recreation
  - Multiple use and a variety of recreation designations.
  - Trail creation, expansion and design for mountain bikes.
    - Take mountain bikers into account both for their use and knowledge of design. Include mountain bikes in trails.
    - Consider single use directional trails in higher density trail areas such as the South Hills.
    - Add mountain bikes to the recreational opportunity spectrum (ROS).

- Increase mountain bike access and specific trails and consider what mountain bikes will look like in the future, and volume of use.
    - Create a mountain bike specific area and/or an ability to obtain a special use permit for a mountain bike area.
  - Consider designated stream setbacks in recreation guidance (camps).
  - Limit off-road and designated motorized use – only where they are supposed to be.
  - More enforcement and FS presence on trails, better signs.
  - Put focused recreation in areas that are not resource-sensitive.
  - More inclusive use of the forest or special programs to reach underprivileged, diverse people, i.e. no fees etc.
  - Minimize activities that promote weed spread.
  - Multiple use = healthy forest and grasslands – reduce weeds and conifer encroachment.
  - Expand on idea of “shared use” – include all forms of mobility and utilization.
  - Provide more quiet zones with an emphasis on loop trails.
  - Maintain quality nonmotorized recreation opportunities, i.e. mountain biking, hiking, hunting on foot, Nordic skiing (both backcountry and track).
  - Improve campsites—conditions and enforcement.
  - Reduce recreational overuse.
- Access—no matter your age or physical condition
  - Increased access points to account for increasing population – maintain rec quality – provide dispersed access points.
  - Maintain access to historically used areas for all user groups, including elderly and disabled.
  - Motorized, elderly and disabled are losing access by motorized means due to road and trail closures.
- Large scale ecosystem connectivity
  - Distinct lack of language for corridors and corridor protection around National Designated Trails.
  - Place our forest in context of a corridor between Glacier and Yellowstone ecosystems.
  - Reduce forest fragmentation by decommissioning or obliterating roads.
  - No new roads.
- Wilderness
  - Designate more, especially for the island ranges.
    - Big Snowies.
    - Middle Fork of the Judith WSA.
    - Northern Crazy Mountains.
    - Edith Baldy and Camas Creek.
    - Elkhorns.

- Electric Peak.
    - Nevada Mountain.
  - Maintenance of wilderness study areas as well as lands eligible for inclusion.
  - Preserve the Crazyes GA with a wilderness recommendation.
  - Limit activities in or near sensitive resource lands to maintain and enhance resource values: riparian zones; wildlife protection; roadless; wilderness.
  - Protect special landscapes with some type of wild designation for cultural/historical purposes
    - Badger Two Medicine;
    - Alice Creek;
    - Continental Divide Trail (CDT) corridor; maintain non-motorized sections
    - Smith River corridor
- Oppose more wilderness designation because it limits mechanized uses.
  - Designated areas are red flags. Need to revisit oil and gas leasing.
- The National Forest will have a much-improved realization that the Elkhorns are special and must be managed with wildlife as a priority. Overgrazed in places.
- Wildlife
  - Protect wildlife resources, wildlife corridors and habitat.
  - Protection of biodiversity (particularly big game and endangered species) through underpasses.
  - Wildlife conservation management that facilitates population stability of a species within its native environment (e.g. grizzly bears are a plains, not mountain species—management of grizzlies to encourage movement back into plains.
  - More specificity on p. 69 at 05 regarding threatened, endangered and candidate wildlife species in the Rocky Mountain Range GA.
  - Protect eagle flyway on Duck Creek Pass (Big Belts GA) – avoid motorized use and hunting.
    - First survey was completed Sept. 5- Nov. 2, 2015 counted 2600 Golden Eagles; 4300 raptors—record count for Montana migration.
- Educational opportunities, including those for minority groups and youth
  - Citizen education on basic ecology
  - More interpretive hikes
  - Teach trail etiquette
  - Good signage and mapping
  - More info about bear safety
  - Continuation of the Youth Forest Monitoring Program and the expansion of youth involvement
  - The public knows about and values their public lands.

- Ecosystem services must be provided by the forest, over and above all other uses.
- Balance in language and addressing importance of ecological integrity as well economic opportunities—particularly in energy development.
- Watershed management – keep in mind when allowing for resource extraction; prioritize watershed health and preservation for the benefit of ecosystems and humans.
  - Unimpaired functioning riparian areas.
  - Manage all streams for thermal and AIS pollution and work to preserve and improve the L&C NF free stone cold fisheries.
  - Bull trout protection on the Blackfoot.
  - Mitigate sediment loading into streams from poorly constructed roads and ATV trails.
  - Look ahead to anticipate the changes in runoff conditions following fires or beetle kill or spruce budworm.
  - Map riparian functional areas for use in allotment management plan (AMP) development.
- More emphasis on economic values – where we can do minerals and timber.
- Vegetation management
  - Provide adequate security/hiding cover for wildlife as well as rangelands & wildlife habitat.
  - Healthy forests; Need to map historic grasslands & maintain them.
  - Minimize/eliminate livestock grazing in sensitive riparian zones.
  - More scientific approach to grazing.
  - Phase out of agricultural grazing on HNF and L&C NF or at least increased oversight and enforcement.
  - Reduction of pack size for soil quality and erosion.
  - Have sustainable functioning vegetative communities: forest, grass, and shrub, riparian. Across all landscapes.
  - Active vegetation management for multiple purposes---jobs, fuels reduction, habitat improvement.
  - Stable nutrient cycling soil resource.
  - Timber harvest
    - Economics and jobs – fuels reduction – there are reasons for active management.
    - Forest utilization rather than preservation – we can benefit & thrive by utilizing timber, range, minerals – we can do it effectively and increase the diversity of the Forest.
    - Restoration of timber harvested areas; replenish grasses and plant trees; remove roads (site specific).
    - Work with local mills on stewardship.
    - Economic opportunities, which strengthen forest as well as the surrounding communities.

- Allow private forest owners to remove reduce weeds and trim and thin on National Forest land contingent to their property when they have equipment and personnel to do the job.
- Effective cooperation between USFSs and Blackfeet to conserve the natural resources for indigenous interests as well as everyone.
- Collaboration/partnerships
  - Institute a citizen advisory group for each GA.
  - Thoroughly develop the partnerships described at section 4.16. There are a lot of people who would be very interested in volunteering for this.
  - Build partnerships around higher valued uses.
  - Expand USFS capacity to engage in partnerships.
  - Utilize partnerships with local groups and volunteers to help monitor conditions in management areas. Provide training and develop a reporting system to a website or some other means.
  - Work with partners (NGOs, others like the MT Wilderness School) to help youth and people who would otherwise be unable to afford overnight use of National Forest.
- Fires and fire management
  - Focus fire management in the interface areas.
  - Less fires “let it burn” in the Bob Marshall Wilderness complex for 2+ reasons: recreational hazard; early snow melt and downstream uses;
  - Need to address trail maintenance needs after fires in wilderness – consider access and impacts to recreation users when making fire use decisions in the wilderness.
  - Fire-adapted communities—ahead of time.
  - Fire funding/prioritization—focus on high value.
- Fire safe community.
- Increased protection of caves through gating. Protects the delicate cave ecosystem. Prevents degradation/graffiti/fatalities, etc. This way keys could be given only to those who would be responsible (respectful and safe) in cave—cavers.
  - Consider the implications of the growing popularity of recreational caving and how to protect these resources. Connect with local speleological organizations such as Northern Rocky Mountain Grotto.
  - Habitat for bats.
  - Recreational use.
  - Nationally significant: caves, rock climbing.
  - Include in the ROS?
- Maximize the ability of the forest to sequester carbon.
- Suggestions specific to Lower Beaver Creek below Nelson to American Bar to Mouth of Beaver Creek into Missouri River:
  - Health of the trees/planting trees in thee fire areas by all.
  - Specific improvements for the road from Nelson down along Beaver Creek to Missouri River.

- Improved campsites along Lower Beaver Creek Road to include garbage dumps, drinkable water.
- To include the plot of BLM land adjacent to Gates of the Mountain Wilderness Area and within A.B. Sub. As part of Wilderness Area.
- Signage between forest property and private property.
- More collaboration with private landowners and Forest Service/MTFWP. Pool financial resources together, especially in the lower Beaver Creek, American Bar/Gates of the Mountain Landowners' Association.
- Better weed control on FS property.

### ***Stanford, November 20, 2015***

Facilitator Shawn Johnson and Judith Basin County Commissioners Jim Moore and Tucker Hughes welcomed community participants to the workshop. FPR team members introduced themselves. After hearing an update on the forest planning process and learning about plan components, participants were asked to think about and write down the DCs they would like to see for the HLC, forestwide or in a particular geographic area over the next 10-20 years.

Participants brought up the following issues and concerns as well as DCs

#### ***Issues and Concerns***

- The forest must listen to local personnel and not be driven from the top down.
- The plan must be fluid, as it appears to our ranch that there is increased use of national forest lands.
- Cattle permits—cattle getting scattered by vehicles, recreationists, hunters—creates issues with gathering up cows. Need to identify conflicts with grazing use and rec. users—also relates to illegal motorized use.

#### ***Desired Conditions***

- A healthy, sustainable forest that's use is maximized by agriculture, timber, aviators and recreationists.
- Increased pre-commercial thinning/tending in previously logged stands.
- More timber harvest—lots of areas have never been logged.
- Keep roads open, especially for older folks. Don't close more roads or trails that have been used for years.
- An inclusive sustainable forest.
- Monitor and measure usage! Adapt!
- Coordinate with local growth plan.
- A plan that recognizes, includes, and conserves wilderness values on the island ranges.
- A plan that recognizes, values, and conserves historic and cultural values in the island ranges.
- A plan that incorporates science as a foundation for managing natural areas.
- Promote more logging of diseased trees to prevent fires.

- Specified areas for motorized vehicles especially in the summer because they disrupt livestock grazing and movement.
- More recreation and logging in the Little Belts to benefit resources and the local economy.
- Better management for general public (not specific groups) and business; less “let burn”.
- Access for emergency, search and rescue vehicles and personnel. Didn’t get a good outcome in the travel plan.
- Update travel maps, increase public information ownership, rules, regulations, etiquette.
- Manage for a mix of uses, including managing some places for wilderness values.