

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision  
Co-Hosted Meeting Summary  
Rio Grande Watershed Emergency Action Coordination Team (RWEACT)  
May 20, 2015**

**Introduction**

This meeting will be a discussion regarding economic issues and impacts of the forest and how RWEACT has seen these impacts. Participants are free to talk about whatever they feel is applicable and necessary. The questions are designed to stimulate conversation, not guide it.

**Forest Plan Revision Process**

The last forest plan was written in 1996 and it guides all activities on the plan. They are revised every 15-20 years. We are using the 2012 planning guidelines. The questions come from the directives and are a subset of the 2012 planning rules. Legally the Forest Service is required to answer these questions and is engaging the public to better answer these questions. These questions can stimulate conversation, but please talk about whatever is necessary. The plan will go until the end of July. Some of the required assessments are geared towards social and economic impacts, while others look at the ecological impacts. These assessments will help the Forest Service better understand the current conditions on the forest.

Once the assessments are completed, they will serve as a guide as the Forest Service identifies the need for change. The current forest plan was written with foresight and is accomplishing its purpose for the most part. Once the need for change is identified, the Forest Service will develop management alternative, which will go through the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. After the NEPA process is complete, they will decide which management alternatives to adopt. The plan revision process is not looking to create an entire new forest plan, but rather to change what needs to be changed. It is not necessary to change what is working and we need help identifying what management actions are currently working.

The public engagement process will finish in July. After the assessments are complete and the NEPA process begins there will be another opportunity for robust public engagement. Instead of asking for help in identifying what is working and what needs to change, this portion of involvement will mainly be focused on discussing the difference between management alternatives. For this stage the Forest Service is looking for help in identifying problems.

Throughout this process, the Forest Service is looking to engage the public in any way we can. Partnering with RWEACT is a great tool to engage members of the community in a meaningful way and we appreciate RWEACT taking the time to meet with us. People can also submit comments through the Forest Service website, email address, US mail, or MindMixer.

**RWEACT Economic Recovery Plan Updates**

RWEACT is excited to participate in this discussion and to partner with the Forest Service and advocate for the needs of San Luis Valley residents. They are hoping to serve as a forum for the public and the Forest Service to have productive and honest discussions about the new forest plan. The new 2012 planning rule is vastly different from the old rules, and engages community members earlier in the process rather than later. This will hopefully lead to a better final forest plan. They are trying to bring folks in on the ground floor.

The small communities in this area were founded based on resources provided by the local forest. Resource extraction has allowed small communities to exist and thrive, and as the economy has moved away from a reliance on these activities it has become even clearer that the forest and surrounding communities are inextricably intertwined. The impacts of the fire are clear on natural resources, but it also

greatly impacted local businesses. The effects of the fire were clear immediately and are continuing today. Two businesses have closed in the past month in Hindsdale County. This is a big deal when there are only 25 businesses.

The Forest Service has been working very closely with RWEACT on developing this plan, which is very fortunate. Typically the USFS engages with communities to accomplish smaller tasks, such as identifying volunteering opportunities. Doing an economic study is more work, but provides useful information. A report is being created to assess the economic impacts of the fire. After that report, RWEACT will look at what actions other communities have taken to help spur economic recovery.

RWEACT has been able to benefit a few funding sources to maintain watershed based activities, early warning notifications, emergency marketing efforts, and economic development. If there are any extra funds, there may be other opportunities to use the money. They have developed five goals for using this money. The first is to support existing businesses by using money to ease business pains caused by the fire. They are also working to increase and support recreational-based businesses. Much of this work will happen in coordination with the Forest Service. Increasing and supporting regional marketing efforts is also very important with communities throughout the area. The fourth goal is to increase heritage tourism, especially as it related to mining and older heritage sites. The fifth goal is research and development opportunities for biomass stewardship to reduce hazards along roads and other areas.

**Discussion**

Participants discussed economic development on the forest and a summary of key themes from the discussions follows.

**What area is influenced by the forest?**

<b>Recreation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hunters and fishers</li> <li>• Outfitters</li> </ul>
<b>Business</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• San Luis Valley irrigators</li> <li>• Cattle grazing</li> </ul>
<b>Ecologic</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compact deliveries</li> <li>• Beetle kill threats</li> <li>• Water runoff and hydrology</li> </ul>
<b>Specific Places</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little Squaw Resort</li> <li>• All communities</li> <li>• Adjacent communities outside the San Luis Valley</li> <li>• Acreage and public ownership in Mineral and Hindsdale County</li> </ul>

**What are reasonable, foreseeable risks to ecological, social, and economic sustainability?**

<b>Ecological</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing landscape</li> <li>• Flooding and water quality</li> <li>• Fire risks by natural causes</li> </ul>
<b>Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to the forest, depending on NEPA permitting</li> <li>• Adaptable management</li> </ul>

**How do Forest Service employment, partnerships, and other operations affect communities?**

<b>Communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate more clearly with the public.</li> <li>• Tell the public what they can do to help.</li> <li>• Encourage outdoor values.</li> <li>• Identify budget areas where the public can contribute in-kind.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share local message with a national audience.</li> <li>• Reduce red tape for the community when possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue volunteering opportunities.</li> <li>• Subordinate control without abdicating responsibility or authority.</li> <li>• Utilize experts in the community, such as retired Forest Service or Colorado Parks and Wildlife employees.</li> <li>• Connect with colleges and universities.</li> <li>• Encourage public to report improper motorized/non-motorized use.</li> </ul>
<b>Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continue to provide jobs for people in the area.</li> <li>• Continue to offer recreation opportunities and activities.</li> <li>• Allow recreation to thrive to benefit local communities.</li> <li>• Avoid closures when possible.</li> </ul>
<b>Partnerships</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate joint ventures with adjacent communities.</li> <li>• Connect to other agencies' lands to increase access.</li> <li>• Pre-approve stewardship opportunities for local-use activities.</li> <li>• Keep district offices manned and open to create more jobs as community resource.</li> <li>• Create lasting partnerships.</li> <li>• Value public-private partnerships.</li> <li>• Continue to work with RWEACT.</li> </ul>

**What are the demands for specific forest resources and services, interests in specific types of management, and cultural needs related to traditional and historic uses?**

<b>Cultural Suggestions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mining is not as prevalent.</li> <li>• Environmental group lawsuits hold up stewardship.</li> <li>• Red tape holds up good plans.</li> <li>• There is a “non-use” value of some small and powerful groups</li> <li>• Agriculture depends on water.</li> <li>• People who have been coming here for a while are likely to come back.</li> <li>• It is a challenge to get some newcomers to visit historical sites.</li> <li>• Mining has historically been an economic driver on the RGNF.</li> <li>• People are interested in revisiting the traditional values associated with</li> </ul>
<b>Management Suggestions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Let conservation lead over protectionism.</li> <li>• Pursue regulatory reform.</li> <li>• Correct legislation that was well-intended by hijacked.</li> <li>• Address changes in market and politics.</li> <li>• Engage public about how to use backcountry.</li> <li>• Tell the public how to be stewards and conservationists.</li> </ul>

**What are the fiscal capabilities of the forest?**

<b>Watersheds</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Serve as stewards of the land, as it belongs to the public.</li> <li>• Use best available science with social values.</li> </ul>
<b>Closures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Look at alternatives to closures.</li> <li>• Consider user fees for continued use.</li> <li>• Limit public access to certain areas is necessary.</li> <li>• Provide local “social license” provided by the public to overcome naysayers.</li> </ul>