

File Code: 1920
Date: March 2, 2016

Dear Forest User:

The Uwharrie National Forest is updating its monitoring program to ensure that it complies with new planning regulations, 36 CFR 219. These regulations require that each forest plan monitoring program must now contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following requirements from 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

- (i) The status of select watershed conditions
- (ii) The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems
- (iii) The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions under 36 CFR 219.9
- (iv) The status of a select set of ecological condition required under 36 CFR 219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened or endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of species of conservation concern.
- (v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives
- (vi) Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area
- (vii-a) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including providing for multiple use opportunities
- (vii-b) Social, economic, and cultural sustainability must also be addressed in the monitoring program
- (viii) The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(C)).

The planning rule further stipulates that all existing forest plans must be modified by May 9, 2016 to meet these eight requirements (see 36 CFR 219.12(c)(1)).

We have conducted a review of the monitoring program associated with the Uwharrie National Forest Plan, which was revised in May, 2012 (hereafter identified as the current monitoring program). We found that the current Uwharrie NF monitoring program, with a few modifications, meets the requirements of the 2012 Planning Regulations, as described below.

Proposed Administrative Change

Refer to: Uwharrie NF Monitoring Program, Administrative Change Proposal (02/19/2016). (Posted on the National Forests in NC website under Forest Plans – Uwharrie National Forest at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/nfsnc/landmanagement/planning>).

A brief explanation of the changes to the monitoring program follows.



The text of the monitoring program was edited to be consistent with the 2012 Planning Regulations. The edits are highlighted in light gray.

Table 4.1 Monitoring Program has been updated and the questions and indicators in the plan have been re-sorted according to which of the eight requirements is met by that question. A brief explanation of the proposed changes to the table follows.

First, the reporting frequency of evaluations has been changed from an annual to biennial reporting periods in the 2012 Planning Regulations. Therefore, the monitoring table shows the reporting frequency in multiples of two years. While the evaluation of the indicators may be at two, four, or six year reporting frequencies, the actual data will usually be collected more frequently than the reporting interval. The first report using this updated monitoring program will be available in September, 2018.

A brief explanation of the questions and indicators by requirement in Table 4.1 follows.

(i)The status of select watershed conditions.

Questions and indicators 1 and 2 are unchanged from the current monitoring program, but are re-sorted under this requirement. The indicators measure key characteristics of watersheds that are important for assessing the sustainability of aquatic ecosystems. The information will be collected in collaboration with the State of North Carolina.

(ii)The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.

Questions 3-5 identify the key terrestrial ecosystems to monitor in the current monitoring program. The questions and indicators have been updated to guide monitoring efforts to track conditions and trends toward restoration of these ecosystems. The key characteristics of these ecosystems are described in Chapter 2 of the Uwharrie NF Plan. Inventories are updated annually but the evaluation of change will be reported in 4 years so that the system of integrating ecosystems into current information systems can be accomplished.

(iii)The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions under 36 CFR 219.9.

Questions 6-10 are new questions that identify focal species. The focal species information will provide information to help assess the functioning of ecosystems, which are identified in each question. Monitoring of focal species is currently underway as part of the Region 8 Breeding Bird Survey project. The information systems for these data are currently functioning so that evaluation should occur biennially.

(iv)The status of a select set of ecological condition required under 36 CFR 219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened or endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of species of conservation concern.

Questions 11-14 are existing questions in the current monitoring program. These questions are tracking selected species “at risk”, unique habitats, and potential threats to the habitats needed for the persistence of those species. On-site surveys will be conducted and reported to address these questions.

(v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.

Question 15 is a new question for the monitoring program, but the information is already tracked through a program called the National Visitor Use Monitoring survey (NVUM) of collecting visitor use and satisfaction data every five years on every national forest in the nation. The NVUM survey results will be used to address this question.

Questions 16 and 17 are existing questions in the current monitoring program to assess progress for achieving recreation objectives.

(vi) Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.

Questions 18-20 are new questions. Climate change creates stressors that should be tracked at larger scales. Therefore, the R8 Broad Scale Monitoring Strategy will address these questions throughout the region. To review these questions and associated indicators in more detail, a draft of the R8 Broad Scale Monitoring Strategy is located on the regional website: www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning.

(vii-a) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including providing for multiple use opportunities.

Questions 21 and 22 are existing questions in the current monitoring program. These questions are focused on tracking management effectiveness, especially for costs and project design. Tracking other multiple use opportunities are described under requirement (v) and (vii-b).

(vii-b) Social, economic, and cultural sustainability must also be addressed in the monitoring program.

Question 23 is an existing question in the current monitoring program that is designed to track conditions of cultural and historic sites.

Question 24 is a new question. Protecting local communities from wildfire is an important aspect of social sustainability. Community Wildfire Protection Plans identify risks to local communities and projects that reduce risks will be tracked in the monitoring program.

Question 25 is a new question that will be tracked through the R8 Broad Scale Monitoring strategy that takes a look at social and economic conditions at regional and sub-regional scales. A draft of the R8 Broad Scale Monitoring Strategy is located on the regional website: www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning.

(viii)The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 USC 1604(g)(3)(C)).

This is a legal requirement in the National Forest Management Act (1976) and will be monitored through on-site surveys at selected sites.

Administrative Change Process and Comment Period

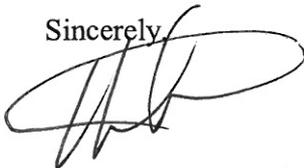
The 2012 Planning Rule allows for corrections or adjustments to Forest Plans using a process called “Administrative Changes.” “Administrative changes” as defined by 36 CFR 219.13(c) is “... any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical 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)).”

As is 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 to provide you with the opportunity to comment on these proposed changes. Comments may be mailed to National Forests in North Carolina, 160A Zillicoa St., Asheville, NC or emailed to comments-southern-north-carolina@fs.fed.us with the subject line “Uwharrie Monitoring”. Comments will be accepted until April 2, 2016. This letter will also be posted on the National Forests in NC website under Forest Plans – Uwharrie National Forest at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/land/nfsnc/landmanagement/planning>

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

Should you have any comments or questions concerning this proposed change, please contact Michelle Aldridge, Forest Planning Staff Officer, at maldridge@fs.fed.us or 828-257-4259.

Sincerely,



HURSTON A. NICHOLAS
Forest Supervisor