



File Code: 1920
Date: March 22, 2016

Dear Interested Party

I am writing to inform you about an upcoming proposed change that we will be making to our Forest Plan monitoring program. We will be modifying the Forest Plan monitoring program to comply with the Forest Service's 2012 Planning Rule. The current monitoring program can be found in Chapter IV of the 2006 Monongahela National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (MNF Forest Plan) updated in 2011. We would like to hear your comments and concerns about the proposed changes.

The 2012 Planning Rule, found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 219, guides Forest Plan monitoring across the Forest Service. The 2012 Planning Rule requires that plans be modified to meet new monitoring requirements (§219.12) by May 9, 2016. This modification is an administrative change to the MNF Forest Plan, not a Plan amendment or revision.

The approach the Monongahela National Forest (MNF) is taking to complete this monitoring transition focuses on addressing the purpose of the Forest Plan monitoring program as described in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(1). Our Forest Plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following eight requirements, which are noted at 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

1. The status of select watershed conditions.
2. The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
3. The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under §219.9.¹
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under §219.9 to 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.²
5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.³

¹ While 'focal species' is a new term introduced in the 2012 Planning Rule, the MNF has identified a species in the existing monitoring program that meets this requirement, thus this requirement would be met

² At this time, species of conservation concern have not been identified for the MNF; therefore, the Forest Plan monitoring program transition will not address species of conservation concern.

³ The MNF currently measures numerous 'other stressors' including insects, disease, invasive species, wildfire, and more.



7. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
8. The effect of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

The MNF already includes the above requirements in the existing Forest Plan monitoring program. We plan to supplement, rather than replace entirely, the monitoring elements found in the current Forest monitoring program. Our strategy is to:

- Retain existing monitoring elements that are providing useful information about implementation of the Forest Plan and many aspects of the eight monitoring requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.
- Delete monitoring elements that either have not provided useful information or do not address the eight requirements.

The monitoring program defines the Forest Plan monitoring questions and the associated indicators. Monitoring questions and associated indicators must be designed to inform the management of resources on the Plan area, including testing of relevant assumptions, tracking relevant changes, and measuring management effectiveness and progress toward achieving or maintain the Plan's desired conditions or objectives. Questions and indicators should be based on one or more desired conditions or objectives, or other components described in the Plan, but not every Plan component needs to have a corresponding monitoring question.

Under the 2012 Planning Rule, the Forest Plan monitoring program will consist of only monitoring questions and associated indicators that evaluate whether Plan components are effective and appropriate and if management is effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward desired conditions and objectives for the Plan area.

The Forest Plan monitoring information will be evaluated every two years in a Monitoring and Evaluation report. The Monitoring and Evaluation report will indicate whether or not a change to the Plan, management activities, or the monitoring program is warranted based on the new information. The Monitoring and Evaluation report must be used to inform adaptive management of the Plan area. The expected publication date of the first biennial Monitoring and Evaluation report is expected to be no later than two years from the date of approval of the administrative change for the Plan monitoring program.

Modifications to the Plan Monitoring Program

We have developed a proposed monitoring program for the Forest Plan that would meet the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. The proposed monitoring program (proposed Chapter IV of the Forest Plan) along with the current monitoring program can be found on our forest website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/mnf/> under the **Monongahela National Forest Monitoring Program Transition** link. They are also available in hard copy by request.

New Information and Approval Framework

The modifications to the Forest Plan monitoring program are being conducted under the administrative change procedures of 36 CFR 219.13(c). I am inviting you to comment on the proposed changes. During this comment process, you may identify other monitoring and information needs.

As the responsible official for the proposal, I will work with the Forest interdisciplinary team to review public comments. I will then notify those who comment on my decision on the administrative change to modify the Forest Plan monitoring program. Administrative changes are not subject to objection or appeal procedures.

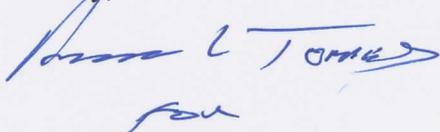
How You Can Comment

This letter initiates the public participation comment period. Your comments will provide useful information as we determine what changes need to be made to the Forest Plan monitoring program. Comments are most useful if received by the end of the 30-day comment period, on April 22, 2016. You may submit your comments as follows:

- Electronic comments must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), Word (.doc), portable document format (.pdf) or any software supported by Microsoft applications. Send electronic comments to: comments-eastern-monongahela@fs.fed.us with the subject line 'Monitoring Program Transition.'
- Send written comments to Clyde Thompson, Forest Supervisor, Attn: Monitoring Program Transition, Monongahela National Forest, 200 Sycamore Street, Elkins, WV 26241.
- Oral comments may be provided in person at the Forest Headquarters (address above), 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday or by calling 304-636-1800.
- Written comments may be hand-delivered to the Forest Headquarters (address above), 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
- Send FAX comments to: 304-636-1875

For more information about this project, please contact Karen Stevens at karenstevens@fs.fed.us or (304) 636-1800. Thank you for your interest in the management of the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,



CLYDE THOMPSON
Forest Supervisor