



File Code: 1920
Date: March 22, 2016

Dear Interested Party

This letter is to notify you of proposed changes to the Land Management Plan (LMP) monitoring program for the Los Padres National Forest, and to seek your comments on those changes. This important program supports an adaptive land management planning process that measures management effectiveness and progress toward achieving or maintaining the plan's desired conditions.

The Forest Service adopted new planning regulations (planning rule) in April 2012, pursuant to the National Forest Management Act. The planning rule requires that existing monitoring programs be changed to meet 8 specific monitoring criteria (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 required under § 219.9.
- (iv) 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.
- (v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
- (vi) Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
- (vii) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
- (viii) The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).

The existing monitoring framework for the Los Padres National Forest (Land Management Plan, Part 3, Appendix C) was last changed in 2014 to comply with a court ordered Settlement Agreement, independent of the planning rule. The changes we are now proposing are mandated by the planning rule, which considers such actions administrative changes. Administrative changes require public notice and opportunity for comment but do not require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Los Padres National Forest is proposing to add new monitoring questions for fire activity, non-native annual grasses, coast live oak, fire regime departure, special uses, and streamflows. We also propose adjustments to the monitoring question for tree mortality, and the indicator for Biological Resource Conditions (Goal 6.2). The reporting frequency for all questions and indicators would be adjusted from every 5 years to every 2 years as mandated by the planning



rule. Criterion (viii) applies only to National Forests with timber production programs, which the Los Padres National Forest does not have. Therefore, no monitoring is needed for this criterion, and it has not been included in the new monitoring framework.

Management indicator species were included in the LMP for monitoring as an indicator of progress towards meeting Goal 6.2. Under the planning rule, focal species replace management indicator species. An interdisciplinary team reviewed potential focal species and selected non-native annual grasses and coast live oak. The combined set of seven existing monitoring questions and six of seven new or modified questions, investigate ecological conditions that sustain at-risk species and target better indicators of progress towards Goal 6.2 than the habitat monitoring of management indicator species. Therefore, in compliance with the planning rule, this administrative change would remove management indicator species from the Los Padres National Forest LMP.

The correction of two clerical errors from the 2014 changes are also included. All other components of the existing plan monitoring framework will be retained, including annual monitoring of selected projects and performance indicators (Parts 2 and 3 Monitoring).

The new monitoring framework and documentation of best available science required by the planning rule are available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/lpnf/landmanagement/planning>.

Please review and provide any comments within 30 days of the date of this letter. Comments may be mailed or delivered in person to the Los Padres National Forest, 6750 Navigator Way, Suite 150, Goleta, CA, 93117; or e-mailed to comments-pacificsouthwest-los-padres@fs.fed.us. Please ensure all comments are clearly marked Attn: 2012 Planning Rule Monitoring Transition.

For additional questions or information, please contact Kyle Kinports, NEPA Coordinator, at 805-961-5710, kkinports@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



ROBERT BAIRD
Forest Supervisor