



**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** March 25, 2016

Dear Interested Public:

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests is preparing to administratively transition our 2015 Forest Plan monitoring program to meet the requirements of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (2012 Planning Rule) and we are seeking public input on the proposed change. The 2015 Forest Plan, including the monitoring program, is posted on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ipnf/landmanagement/planning>.

The 2012 Planning Rule, found in the Code of Federal Regulations at 36 CFR 219, guides Forest Plan monitoring across the Forest Service and requires monitoring programs be modified to meet new requirements by May 9, 2016. This modification is an administrative change to the forest plan and doesn't require an amendment or revision.

The 2012 Planning Rule requires at least one question for eight specific topics, all of which the Idaho Panhandle National Forests monitoring program currently addresses. In addition, monitoring is required to address social, economic, and cultural sustainability, which the Idaho Panhandle National Forests monitoring program also currently includes. Therefore, we will not be adding, deleting, or modifying any of the current monitoring program questions.

There is one required change needed during this transition. The 2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forests monitoring program currently includes a question to monitor habitat trends for three management indicator species (MIS) as required by the 1982 Planning Rule. In response to criticisms related to the MIS concept, the [1999 Committee of Scientists Report](#) recommended that the National Forest Management Act regulations be rewritten to use focal species and species at risk, rather than MIS. Accordingly, the 2012 Planning Rule requires forests to monitor the status of focal species for the purpose of monitoring the ecological conditions necessary for maintaining diverse plant and animal communities.

Anticipating this change would be needed, we carefully chose two MIS that would be well-suited as indicators of progress toward desired conditions and wrote their associated monitoring question accordingly. Through this administrative change to the monitoring program, the landbird assemblage will be used as a focal species to indicate the integrity of terrestrial vegetation structure and function, and the aquatic macroinvertebrate assemblage will help indicate the integrity of aquatic habitat (water quality). The monitoring question itself will remain unchanged. We will continue to monitor elk security as currently described in the monitoring program as a stand-alone (non-focal species) question because of its importance as a commonly hunted species.



The attachment to this letter details the transition process and administrative change. If you have any comments regarding this administrative change, we would like to hear from you. Comments would be most helpful if received by April 25, 2016. Please contact Karl Dekome at (208) 765-7479 or [kdekome@fs.fed.us](mailto:kdekome@fs.fed.us) with questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M Farnsworth', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

MARY FARNSWORTH  
Forest Supervisor