



Forest
Service

Nebraska National Forests
and Grasslands

125 North Main Street
Chadron, NE 69337-2118
308-432-0300
308-432-0304 TDD

April 4, 2016

Dear Interested Party:

The *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands* seeks your input as we transition our monitoring plan to be consistent with 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (Planning Rule). The Planning Rule requires all National Forests to update monitoring plans by May 9, 2016. The date of this letter begins the 30-day solicitation for public comments.

The *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands* monitoring transition strategy focuses on evaluating existing monitoring items and considering new items that more efficiently or effectively address the desired conditions, objectives, and other plan components found in the Land and Resource Management Plan 2001 Revision Nebraska National Forest and Associated Units. Some existing monitoring items are being recommended for removal because they are obsolete, redundant, or are too expensive to consistently implement. Some monitoring items are being modified or introduced, to more accurately or efficiently monitor changes in the *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands*.

The Planning Rule requires that monitoring items should appear in the form of a question, with a specific monitoring indicator. Monitoring items should incorporate the best available scientific information, but remain within the fiscal and technical capabilities of the *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands*. Forest plan monitoring will be reported biennially (every two years), starting from the date of the monitoring plan transition.

Questions and indicators must inform the management of resources on the *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands*. They are designed to 1) test relevant assumptions; 2) track relevant changes; and 3) measure management effectiveness and progress toward achieving desired conditions or objectives described in the Land and Resource Management Plan 2001 Revision Nebraska National Forest and Associated Unit. Although monitoring questions should address plan components, not every plan component needs to have a corresponding monitoring question. Please note this is not a Forest Plan amendment or revision process, so we are not reevaluating the plan components or other aspects of the Forest Plan at this time.

The new monitoring plan should contain at least one question for each of the following eight categories:

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 ecological conditions;
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern;

5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives;
6. Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area;
7. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities (including social and economic considerations); and
8. The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

Please note that the Rocky Mountain Regional Office is concurrently working on a broader-scale monitoring strategy, to identify monitoring items that are best addressed at geographic scale larger than a single National Forest or National Grassland. This broader scale strategy will be completed after this transition, but it will help monitor and track changes of broader scale issues that are still important to the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands.

Kevin Atchley, the responsible official for the proposed changes, will review your comments on the proposed changes, as well as new information for consideration. The modifications to the forest plan monitoring programs are being conducted under the administrative change procedures of 36 CFR 219.13(c), and are not subject to appeal, objection, or other administrative review.

You may mail or hand-deliver your comments between 8 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays, or mail them to *Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands, 125 N Main, Chadron, NE 69337*. Electronic comments must be submitted to cloop@fs.fed.us. Please include "proposed monitoring transition" in the subject of your email.

Other relevant information can be found at:

Land and Resource Management Plan 2001 Revision Nebraska National Forest and Associated Unit www.fs.fed.us/ngp

Proposed Monitoring Plan
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/nebraska/landmanagement/projects>

Planning Rule at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/planningrule/home/?cid=stelprdb5359471>

After reviewing and considering public comment, the responsible official's decision will be documented in a letter that can be found on our website

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/nebraska/landmanagement/projects>

For more information, please contact myself at 308-432-0336. Thank you for your interest in the management of the Nebraska National Forests and Grasslands.

Sincerely,

/s/Carla Loop

Environmental Coordinator