Inventory and Evaluation Process for Lands that may or may not be Suitable for Inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System

DRAFT Evaluation Criteria

Introduction

When revising the land management plan, the Santa Fe National Forest is required to identify and evaluate lands that may or may not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS) and determine whether to recommend to Congress any such lands for wilderness[1]. A description of this process can be found in the 2012 Forest Service Planning Rule and Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12. This process includes the following four steps:

1. Inventory. Identify and inventory all lands that may or may not be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System using a given set of criteria
2. Evaluation. Evaluate the wilderness characteristics of each inventoried area using a given set of criteria
3. Analysis. The forest supervisor will determine which areas to further analyze in the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process
4. Recommendation. The forest supervisor will decide which areas, if any, to recommend to Congress for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System (NWPS).

Lands evaluated and analyzed through this process and the resulting NEPA analysis are only preliminary administrative recommendations; Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on wilderness designation.

Step 2: Evaluation

The primary function of the evaluation step is to identify all lands in the inventory for wilderness characteristics. All lands included from the inventory must be evaluated in this step.

The evaluation is based on the criteria identified in the Forest Service Handbook and further defined by the Santa Fe National Forest through public and government participation[2]. This document outlines initial draft criteria definitions that the Santa Fe National Forest planning team has developed, and this criteria will be edited and refined based on public input received through public engagement efforts in April-May of 2016.

The evaluation step of the process has a given set of criteria which are explained and identified below in the following sections.

[1] FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70, section 71.21 and section 71.22a
[2] FSH 1909.12 Chapter 70, section 70.61

Evaluation Criteria Definitions

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines criteria for evaluation of lands for wilderness characteristics. These criteria, and initial draft definitions further defined by the Santa Fe National Forest planning team, are outlined in the following sections.

Criterion 1: Apparent Naturalness

This criterion evaluates the degree to which an area generally appears to be affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprints of man's work substantially unnoticeable.

Table 1. Apparent Naturalness Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[3]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Question 1a. What is the composition of plant and animal communities? The purpose of this question is to determine if plant and animal communities appear substantially unnatural[4] .	• Describe the dominant vegetation types, associations, and plant and animal communities. • How are concentrations of nonnative plants and/or animals distributed across the land? • Other (Include any additional information related to the question above)
Question 1b. What is the extent to which the area appears to reflect ecological conditions that would normally be associated with the area without human intervention?	• Describe the distribution and amount of vegetation restoration treatments (e.g. thinning), timber harvest areas, and associated activities • Does the vegetation appear natural (consider elements, including but not limited to vegetation, wildlife, soil, air, etc.)? • Other (Include any additional information related to the question above)

[3] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

[4] When evaluating for apparent naturalness, the evaluation will be based on a balance between the perception of the average forest visitor and subject matter expertise

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[3]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Question 1c. What is the extent to which improvements[5] included in the area represent a departure from apparent naturalness?	• Consider the extent to which the improvements cause the appearance to depart from apparent naturalness to the area as a whole. Consider the appearance and concentrations of all improvements listed below: ○ Linear travelways, including any remaining roads (including system, decommissioned, temporary, or user-created), system trails[6], and known unauthorized routes ○ Airstrips, heliports, and/or landing zones ○ Permanently installed vertical structures ○ Areas of mining activity, including exploration and prospecting ○ Range or wildlife improvements (such as fences, agricultural water pipelines (typically less than 2 inch diameter), water troughs, earthen tanks, corrals, or trick tanks). ○ Recreation improvements ○ Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and powerlines ○ Watershed treatment areas (such as contouring, diking, channeling) ○ Structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation (that are not considered a part of the cultural landscape) • Other (Include any additional information related to the question above)

Criterion 2- Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation

This criterion evaluates the degree to which the area has outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and unconfined type of recreation. An area only has to possess one or the other; the area does not have to possess outstanding opportunities for both elements, nor does it need to have outstanding opportunities on every acre. The definitions for this criterion are identified in the table below.

[5] The use of the term "improvements" in this context is taken from the Forest Service Handbook, and means the evidence of past human activities in the area as a whole.

[6] System trails are acceptable improvements in wilderness areas; the purpose of this consideration is to consider whether or not the concentration, appearance, and density of system trails in the area impact the area's apparent naturalness.

Table 2. Outstanding Opportunities for Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[7]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Question 2a. Consider impacts that are pervasive and influence a visitor's opportunity for solitude within the evaluated area.	• Can a traveler see or hear evidence of civilization from within the area? Consider proximity of area to high use areas, private lands, roads[8], and/or activities that impact opportunities for solitude. Consider pervasiveness of impacts, and also potential seasonal variabilities. • What is the level of challenge and risk in the area? What is the likelihood of encounters with others? • Describe the general topography of the area in context of sight, sound, and screening. • Other (Include any additional information)
Question 2b. Consider the opportunity to engage in primitive-type or unconfined recreation activities that lead to a visitor's ability to feel a part of nature. *Note: Examples of primitive-type recreation activities include observing wildlife, hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, fishing, hunting, floating, kayaking, cross-country skiing, camping, and enjoying nature.*	• Describe the types of primitive recreation activities in the area. • Describe other types of non-primitive recreation activities in the area. • Is the area relatively free of restrictions on visitor behavior, providing an unconfined experience? • Are facilities or user controls provided that decrease opportunities for self-reliant recreation? • Other (Include any additional information)

Criterion 3- Unique and Outstanding Qualities

This criterion evaluates the degree to which the area may contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value. These values are not required to be present in an area for the area to be recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, but their presence should be identified and evaluated where they exist.

When evaluating unique and outstanding qualities, consider if the feature is iconic, unique at a regional or national scale, and the extent that the feature defines how people think about and value the area.

[7] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

[8] Including any effects from adjacent cherry-stemmed roads along area boundaries.

Table 3. Unique and Outstanding Qualities Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[9]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Question 3a. Does the area contain rare plant or animal communities or rare ecosystems? *Note: Rare in this context is defined as national in scale.*	• Presence of rare species or ecosystems? • Other (Include any additional information)
Question 3b. Are there any outstanding landscape features such as waterfalls, mountains, viewpoints, waterbodies, or geologic features?	• Description of any outstanding and unique features in the area, including significance and extent. • Percent of area mapped as Scenic Class 1 in the Forest's Scenery Management System inventory.[10] • Other (Include any additional information)
Question 3c. Are there historic and cultural resource sites in the area of regional or national significance? *Consider if the feature is nationally recognized (for example, through an official designation such as the National Register) or if the features is considered a priority heritage asset.*	• Presence of significant historic or cultural resources sites? • Other (Include any additional information)
Question 3d. Are there any research natural areas?	• Percent of area that is part of a research natural area. • Other (Include any additional information)
Question 3e. Are there any high quality water resources or important watershed features?	• Presence and extent of high quality water resources or important watershed features in the area. Consider wild and scenic rivers and outstanding national resource waters. • Other (Include any additional information)

[9] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

[10] The Forest Service's Scenery Management System (SMS) provides the framework to effectively inventory, assess, and manage scenic resources. Scenic Class is a component of the SMS inventory, and is the primary indicator of the relative importance, or public value, of areas with distinctive scenery and visibility. It is a combination of distinct landscape features (landform, vegetation, rocks, water features, cultural features) and the extent that the public values and sees these features. Scenic Class 1 represents those areas that are most valued, most visible, and contain the most distinct landscape features. Refer to the Forest Service Scenery Management Handbook for more information, http://fsweb.r1.fs.fed.us/rmlhw/scenery_mgmt/handbooks_references/sms_hanbook_701-opt.pdf.

Criterion 4: Manageability

This criterion evaluates the degree to which the area may be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics, considering current conditions.

Table 4. Manageability Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[11]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Question 4a. Can the area be managed to preserve its wilderness characteristics? *Describe factors that are or are not compatible with managing for wilderness character.*	• Shape and configuration of the area. Describe the boundary, edge to interior ratio, and presence of cherry-stemmed roads, etc. • Presence and extent of legally established rights or uses within the area and how theses uses may support or impact managing an area for wilderness characteristics (e.g. active mining claims, grazing allotment maintenance needs, motorized or mechanized use, special uses, cultural or traditional uses)[12] • Presence and extent of any specific Federal or State laws that may be relevant to availability of the area for wilderness or the ability to manage the area to protect wilderness characteristics (including but not limited to designated or proposed critical habitat). • Describe management of adjacent lands. • Presence and extent of wildland urban interface in the area. Include percent if possible. • Describe management activities or restrictions within the area (e.g. upcoming management decisions or projects on District Schedule of Proposed Actions). • Presence of Inventoried Roadless Area. Include % if possible. • Other (Include any additional information)

[11] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

[12] The impacts and alternatives relating to unauthorized uses are considered in the analysis phase of the inventory and evaluation of lands that may be suitable for inclusion in NWPS. For example, if an area experiencing unauthorized fuelwood cutting was carried forward in an alternative as potential wilderness, the impacts and effects of managing unauthorized use within a recommended wilderness area would be analyzed (e.g. increased enforcement needs). Additionally, this same area may be included in an alternative as a potential fuelwood gathering management area as an alternative to potential wilderness.