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

DRAFT Inventory 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 1: Inventory

The primary function of the inventory step is to identify all lands on the Santa Fe National Forest that will be evaluated for wilderness characteristics as defined in the Wilderness Act.

The inventory is intended to be broad and inclusive, based on the inventory 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 intent of the inventory step is to identify lands that may or may not have wilderness characteristics, and to allow for public input and feedback on the inventoried areas. Inclusion in the inventory is not a designation that conveys or requires a particular kind of management; rather, inclusion in the inventory means an area will go on to be evaluated for wilderness characteristics.

The inventory step of the process has a given set of criteria—size, roads, and other improvements—which are explained and identified below in the following sections. Areas identified using the inventory criteria will then be evaluated, using a whole new set of criteria defined in the evaluation criteria.

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

Inventory Criteria

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines criteria for what should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. There are two broad categories of criteria, and these are as follows: 1) size, 2) improvements. The "improvements" category includes, as follows, 1) roads and 2) substantially noticeable improvements. These criteria, and initial draft definitions further defined by the Santa Fe National Forest planning team, are outlined in the following sections.

Size

Areas to be included in the inventory must be federal lands and must meet one of the following size criteria:

1. The area contains 5,000 acres or more.
2. The area contains less than 5,000 acres but is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition, including but not limited to areas adjacent to an existing wilderness, primitive area, administratively recommended wilderness, or wilderness inventory of other Federal ownership.

For areas less than 5,000 acres that are not adjacent to the above, the Responsible Official will need to consider and determine whether such areas could be preserved in an unimpaired condition.

Improvements

Improvements are things that show evidence of human activities such as roads, structures, or past management activities. The presence of such improvements does not necessarily eliminate areas for consideration in the inventory; however, certain improvements may be removed from lands at the inventory stage. The different criteria for improvements are outlined below.

Road Improvements Criteria

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines criteria for what road[3] improvements should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. The Santa Fe National Forest has further defined these criteria; these definitions are shown in the table below.

[3] Note: A forest road is defined as a road wholly or partly within or adjacent to and serving the National Forest System that the Forest Service determines is necessary for the protection, administration, and utilization of the System and the use and development of its resources (36 CFR 212.1).

Table 1. Road Improvements Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[4]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Roads	Roads potentially eliminated from inventory: 1. Permanently authorized roads for which a valid easement or interest has been properly recorded. 2. Forest roads maintained to levels 2, 3, 4, or 5[5] identified on the Santa Fe National Forest's Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) in the Travel Management decision of 2012 (Level 2 roads are open for use by high-clearance vehicles. Level 3 roads are open and maintained for travel by a prudent driver in a standard passenger car. Level 4 and 5 roads are open and provide a moderate to high degree of user comfort and convenience). 3. Roads identified as 'provisional' under the Travel Management decision in 2012. *Note: Potentially eliminated roads will also have a buffer of approximately 100 feet on either side of the road centerline, to include room for the road width, right-of-way, and potential geospatial data inaccuracies.* Roads carried forward in inventory and considered in evaluation[6]: 1. Areas that contain forest roads maintained to level 1 (closed to all motor vehicles); 2. Areas with any routes that are decommissioned, unauthorized or temporary, or forest roads that are identified for decommissioning in a previous decision document 3. Areas with forest roads that will be reclassified to level 1 through a previous decision document 4. Areas with historical wagon routes, historical mining routes, or other settlement era transportation routes considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area. 5. Areas with motorized trails. These are not considered roads and will be kept in the inventory and considered in evaluation.

Other Improvements Criteria

Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook 1909.12 outlines criteria for other improvements that should and should not be included in the inventoried areas. One such criterion allows the exclusion of improvements that are substantially noticeable to the area as a whole, which the Santa Fe National Forest further defined (Table 2 below).

The term "substantially noticeable" is not directly defined in Chapter 70 of the Forest Service Land Management Planning Handbook. The interdisciplinary team developed a draft definition of "substantially noticeable" for the other improvements criteria; this definition will be refined based on public comment and input in April/March 2016. An improvement is substantially noticeable when it creates a noticeable difference in form, line, color, texture and pattern in the surrounding natural landscape at a size, scale, or concentration that contrasts with the surrounding natural landscape. To be substantially noticeable, the improvement or concentration of improvements must be more dominant

[4] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

[5] For Forest Service road maintenance level definitions, please see "Guidelines for Roads Maintenance Levels" available at http://www.fs.fed.us/eng/pubs/pdf/05771205.pdf

[6] Guidance on forest road improvements considered can be found in FSH 1909.12, chapter 70, section 71.22a.

than the surrounding natural landscape scene. Substantially noticeable considerations for the "other improvements" are listed in more detail below.

To be considered substantially noticeable in the area as a whole, the "other improvements" must be:

1. substantially noticeable according to the above definition
2. widespread in the landscape, reflecting pervasive past human influence
3. visible using aerial imagery at the forest-wide scale (1 inch = 1 mile) or if not visible on aerial imagery, have a pervasive impact on the area when viewed from the ground. This pervasive impact determination will be based on field knowledge and documented in this process.

Not all improvements that are substantially noticeable will be eliminated from the inventory. Those substantially noticeable improvements not eliminated during inventory, as well as other improvements not considered substantially noticeable, will be considered during evaluation, under the criterion of "apparent naturalness" (see Criterion 1 in the evaluation criteria).

The definitions and examples listed below will be considered when reviewing improvements, but field knowledge and subject matter expertise will also be used in final determinations on whether an improvement is included or eliminated from the inventory. Improvements that are mapped as features in geospatial data will be documented as areas, with 100' around that single feature to account for footprint and geospatial mapping errors.

Table 2. Other Improvements Criteria

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[7]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Airstrips and Heliports	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Surfaced runways, landing pads, or heliports with permanent structures. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Any unsurfaced runways, landing pads, or heliports and without permanent structures

[7] From FSH 1909.12 Directives, Chapter 70

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[7]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Vegetation treatments and Timber harvest areas	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable'[8]: Clear cut forested areas, fuel breaks, and areas of pinyon-juniper chaining that are currently substantially noticeable on the area as a whole. Substantially noticeable means the treatment is more dominant than the surrounding landscape. Edges of the treatment create a noticeable difference in form, line and texture found in the landscape, being dominant, abrupt, strongly defined, vegetation regeneration is minimal. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Vegetation treatments such as prescribed fire use and non-commercial fuels reduction treatments that do not produce wood products, areas of sage mowing. Areas with legacy (closed) logging roads, fuelwood, or other thinned areas and other timber harvest areas where logging and prior road construction are not substantially noticeable.
Permanently installed vertical structures, such as electronic installations that support television, radio, telephone, or cellular communications	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Vertical structures (1) extend above the surrounding tree or shrub height (2) require regular access for maintenance, (3) the associated ground disturbance is 1 acre or greater, and/or (4) occur in a concentration. Potentially eliminate the entire concentration or affected area from inventory. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Any vertical structures shorter than the surrounding tree or shrub height, structures with ground disturbance of less than 1 acre, those that do not require regular maintenance, and other permanently installed vertical structures provided their impacts, as well as their maintenance and access needs, are minimal.
Areas of mining activity	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Areas of commercial open pit mining that have not undergone reclamation, active mining operations, gas extraction wells, and areas of active mine reclamation. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: sand and gravel pits, permit rock collection areas, small mining claims, or historic mining evidence, and other areas of mining activity where impacts are not substantially noticeable.

[8] This is not solely based on FACTS reporting, but on what can be seen on aerial photography at a 1 inch = 1mile or 1:63,360 scale. FACTS or other evidence of past activities may be used to locate potential exclusions, but substantially noticeable judgement is based on aerial photo interpretation

Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[7]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Range improvement areas	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Water developments with improvements that extend above the surrounding tree or shrub height and the total ground disturbance is 1 acre or greater. Concentrations of improvements may be eliminated if determined that the concentration is substantially noticeable on the area as a whole and supporting rationale is documented. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: fences, agricultural water pipelines (typically less than 2 inch diameter), water troughs, earthen tanks, corrals, or trick tanks.
Recreation improvements	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Developed recreation sites (for example ski areas, campgrounds, or interpretive sites of a permanent nature) as defined by current forest plan management areas or special use permit boundaries. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Areas with dispersed camping sites and outfitter camps as they are temporary and easily removed. Existing non-motorized, mechanized (bike), or motorized trails, or any user created trails are included in the inventory. Trails are not considered to be a developed recreational improvement in the inventory criteria.
Ground-return telephone lines, electric lines, and powerlines	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Powerlines or other utilities with cleared rights-of-way, other permanently installed linear right-of-way structures (such as a tramway), permanent above ground pipelines over 6 inches in diameter (typically industrial grade pipelines). Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: ground return lines and electric lines if a right-of-way has not been cleared and pipelines under 6 inches in diameter.
Watershed treatment areas (such as contouring, diking, channeling)	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Non-earthen dams, post-fire flooding control improvements (i.e., filter dams made of non-natural materials), and terraced areas. Earthen dams may be eliminated if they are considered substantially noticeable to the area as a whole. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Earthen dams, other in-stream structures, and fish barriers, and other watershed treatment areas that are not substantially noticeable

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Inventory Criteria Identified in Planning Directives[7]	Inventory Criteria Further Defined by Santa Fe National Forest
Structures, dwellings, and other relics of past occupation	Improvements potentially eliminated from inventory as 'substantially noticeable': Structures whose primary function is dedicated to housing or a concentration of other permanent building structures including developed recreation improvement structures. Improvements carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Areas with structures, dwellings and other relics of past occupation when they are considered part of the historical and cultural landscape of the area
Lands adjacent to development or activities that impact opportunities for solitude.	Areas carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Areas adjacent to development or activities will be included in the inventory. Boundaries will be extended to the edge of adjacent development defined by the ground disturbance footprint or as described for each improvement category. *Note: An adjacent development or activity that impacts opportunities for solitude will be considered in the evaluation step (see Criterion 2 in evaluation criteria).*
Areas with improvements that have been proposed by the Forest Service for consideration as recommended wilderness as a result of a previous Forest planning process or that the Responsible Official merits for inclusion in the inventory that were proposed for consideration through public or intergovernmental participation opportunities	Areas carried forward in the inventory and considered in evaluation: Include if identified

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