



File Code: 1920
Date: May 6, 2016

Dear Interested Party:

In 2012, the USDA Forest Service adopted a new Planning Rule that directs the revision of land and resource management plans (forest plans), which are the documents that guide the management of National Forests. The Ottawa's Forest Plan was approved in 2006 (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/ottawa/forestplan>). To be compliant with the 2012 Planning Rule, every Forest must update their monitoring program by May 9, 2016.

In March 2016, the Ottawa National Forest released a document outlining the proposed changes to the 2006 Forest Plan's Monitoring Program. This letter serves to notify you that the Monitoring Program Transition process is now complete. Updates to the Monitoring Program have been incorporated through an administrative change, as allowed by the 2012 Planning Rule.

Forest Plan Monitoring

The current monitoring program consists of 44 questions, which are outlined in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. Answering these questions help to determine whether the activities implemented are resulting in desired conditions stated in Forest Plan direction or if adjustments need to be made.

As a result of the Monitoring Program Transition process, the current Monitoring Program has been updated as follows. Notification of these changes was provided during the 30-day comment period.

- Added five Monitoring Questions, and associated indicators. Monitoring Questions 5, 11, 26 and 27 were added to satisfy requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. Monitoring Question 17 was added to incorporate monitoring previously outlined in the Comprehensive River Management Plan (CRMP) for the Wild and Scenic Rivers designated on the Ottawa. The decision for the CRMP resulted in Amendment #1 of the Forest Plan in 2007, but the monitoring was not incorporated into the Forest Plan as part of the amendment.
- Dropped 16 Monitoring Questions because they did not comply with the 2012 Planning Rule; did not provide meaningful trend information; or consisted of topics that were addressed through other monitoring questions.
- Monitoring Question 28 was modified to be more comprehensive for monitoring how implementation of the Forest Plan implementation effects waterbodies. Minor edits were also performed to clarify the language of Monitoring Questions as necessary.
- As a result of changes, the Monitoring Program now is comprised of 38 Questions.



Required Updates to the Monitoring Program

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the following eight elements to be monitored by each National Forest. Authorizing this administrative change ensures the Forest Plan's Monitoring Program is compliant with this Rule (36 CFR 219.13(c)).

1. Status of select watershed conditions.
2. Status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
3. Status of focal species to assess ecological conditions
4. Status of a select set of ecological conditions required to contribute to the recovery of Federally-listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain viable populations of each species of conservation.
5. Status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measurable changes on the plan are 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 providing multiple use opportunities.
8. The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

Public and External Agency Participation

In accordance with the 2012 Planning Rule requirements (36 CFR 219.16(c)(6)), a 30-day public review and comment period was held, beginning March 11, 2016. We received five comments as a result of this process (see Appendix 1). An additional outreach was held in December 2015 in an effort to collaborate with Tribes, external agencies and partners. I have considered all input received and as a result of these outreaches, and I have incorporated the following recommendations into the updated Monitoring Program.

- Modified the indicators for climate change monitoring to include the Drought Risk Atlas and Accumulated Winter Season Severity Index models to address a comment from the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science (see Monitoring Question 27).
- Modified the question and indicators for Tribal relations by including facets of legal trust responsibilities to address a comment received from the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community (see Monitoring Question 15).

Additional Administrative Change

As disclosed during the 30-day comment period, we used this opportunity to include an additional administrative change to update Forest Plan direction for a Research Natural Area (RNA) within the Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness. During the 2006 Forest Plan revision process, this area was identified as a candidate RNA. On December 7, 2012, the Regional Forester designated this area, comprising 351 acres as a RNA. The updated Forest Plan direction for this RNA is outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 of the Forest Plan.

Updated Forest Plan Direction

In summary, this administrative change updates Chapters 2, 3 and 4 of the Forest Plan. Chapters 2 and 3 (pages 2-11 and 3-38, 3-39 and 3-42, respectively) have been modified to incorporate new language for the designated Sturgeon River Gorge Wilderness Research Natural Area. The entirety of Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan has been modified to incorporate the updated Monitoring Program. The updated pages of the Forest Plan are included with this letter (see Appendix 2). This new information has been incorporated into the Forest Plan chapters, which is posted on the Ottawa's website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/ottawa/forestplan>).

If you have questions about this process, please contact Marlanea French-Pombier, Forest Planner, at 906-932-1330, extension 303, or e-mail: mfrenchpombier@fs.fed.us.

Sincerely,



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