

**Administrative Change #9  
Completion of the Monitoring Plan Transition  
Process**

Administrative changes are defined at 36 CFR 219.3(c) (2012 Planning Rule), are not Plan amendments or revisions, do not require the preparation of a document under Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures, and may be made at any time following public notice (219.16(c)(6)). Administrative changes include the following:

- 1.) Corrections of clerical errors,
- 2.) Changes to ensure conformance with new statutory or regulatory requirements, and
- 3.) Changes to other content in the Plan (219.7(f)).

The 2012 Planning Rule contains updated requirements for Forest Plan monitoring for all national forests. The Rule requires that every national forest's monitoring plan be updated by May 9, 2016, to address eight resource items with at least one monitoring question and associated indicator(s). Reporting will also change from annual to biennial. The eight monitoring topics we must address are:

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 the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 219.9.
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 219.9 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 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.
8. The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)).

The Wayne National Forest monitoring plan already includes six of the above elements (numbers 1, 2, 3<sup>1</sup>, 4, 5, and 7). New questions were developed to satisfy elements 6 and 8. In considering

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<sup>1</sup> While not termed "focal species" in the monitoring plan, the WNF already monitors for management indicator species. We have identified 3 of these species to be a good fit for focal species, and thus the requirement is met. The term management indicator species will no longer appear in the monitoring plan.

the entirety of the monitoring plan, we also determined there are some questions that are no longer relevant or are not feasible to obtain. These questions are eliminated from the plan.

In addition to ensuring that the monitoring plan addresses the eight required elements, the transition includes changing reporting frequency to biennial, and identifying questions and indicators rather than questions only.

Public feedback was invited and considered prior to completing this transition. We received comments back from members of the public asking us to expand our monitoring beyond what is in the Plan or to expand the frequency of monitoring. Specifically, respondents were interested in expanded climate change, recreation, and wildlife monitoring. The 2012 Planning Rule provides discretion to Forest Supervisors in determining what the right size is for Forest-level Monitoring Plans.

In regards to climate change, we considered information provided in the Central Appalachians Forest Ecosystems Vulnerability Assessment and Synthesis, which described the current observations of a changing climate in the region and predicted future outlooks for various tree species and ecological resources, using recognized and credible models. In addition, we considered a suite of questions developed through the work of the Northern Institute of Applied Climate Science (NIACS) and National Forests in the Upper Midwest. The questions of interest to us include changes in soil moisture, annual rainfall totals and discrete event rainfall totals, distribution of tree species, the timing of budburst of specific species, the timing and duration of the growing season, and changes in the distribution of non-native invasive species. Changes in tree species distributions due to climate change is of particular interest and was identified as a need through a climate change workshop conducted on the Forest with NIACS. However, we determined that it was not practical to figure out the specific monitoring protocol in time for the required completion date of this transition. We will continue to pursue this monitoring item as part of the larger oak management strategy in southeast Ohio with our partners, but will not incorporate it into the Forest Monitoring Plan at this time. I felt we must use something specific, measureable, and easy to obtain. In keeping with these criteria, I selected the length of the growing season as our monitoring question. Changes in growing season length can be beneficial in some circumstances, such as when water is plentiful throughout its duration. A longer growing season can influence fire risk, susceptibility to insects, diseases, and frost damage.

Understanding how the growing season length changes over time can provide important information about climate change impacts on the forest.

Recreational opportunities are assessed using a variety of means, including the mileage and condition of various types of trail and the results of the National Visitor Use Monitoring survey. This survey is conducted every five years and does include trailheads of hiking trails (i.e. “non-consumptive backcountry recreational opportunities”). Monitoring of dispersed, backcountry recreational opportunities outside of discrete entry points (i.e. trailheads) would require a staff time commitment that is not sustainable.

Our wildlife program monitoring is robust and follows well-recognized protocols, many of which feed into large-scale datasets, such as the North American Breeding Bird Survey. Three bird species, the cerulean warbler, ruffed grouse, and Henslow’s sparrow, were selected as focal species in order to gauge our success at providing very specific habitat types for a variety of

plant and animal species. These species, along with all other birds, are recorded along established routes within the Forest. Federally threatened or endangered species for which the Wayne provides habitat are monitored, following protocols agreed to by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS). The U.S. FWS has agreed that suitable habitat for federally-listed mussels does not occur on the Wayne, outside of the Ohio River.

As for frequency of monitoring, the 2012 Planning Rule does dictate that monitoring should be a continuous endeavor. This does not necessarily mean that monitoring should be done annually, monthly, daily, or even more often, but just that the data should be collected regularly over time in order to determine and recognize trends and measure progress towards anticipated benchmarks. I did decide to change the monitoring frequency for soil disturbance and scenic integrity objectives from biennial to annual, based on public feedback. I feel that the frequency of monitoring displayed in the updated Forest Monitoring Plan is satisfactory in meeting the purpose of recognizing trends and progress towards benchmarks.

Overall I am satisfied that the Forest Monitoring Plan, as now updated to be in compliance with the 2012 Planning Rule, provides a reasonable framework for assessing progress towards meeting the multiple goals and objectives in the Forest Plan.

These changes are incorporated into Administrative Change # 9, and replace the existing Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan in its entirety. The updated Chapter 4, Monitoring and Evaluation, is attached. The first biennial Monitoring Report will covering Fiscal Years 2015 and 2016 and will be released by September 30, 2017.



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ANTHONY V. SCARDINA  
Forest Supervisor



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