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**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** May 6, 2016

Dear Interested Party

The Monongahela National Forest (MNF) made changes to our Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) monitoring program to comply with the Forest Service's 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.12) and to update the existing monitoring program. These changes have been incorporated into an updated Chapter IV - Monitoring and Evaluation of the Forest Plan and posted on our internet site as: Administrative Change #1 Chapter IV Monitoring and Evaluation.

The proposed changes were available for public comment for 30 days (March 23, 2016 through April 22, 2016). Two comments were received. The comments did not result in any changes to the proposed monitoring program.

### **Background**

The 2012 Planning Rule, which went into effect March 2012, requires our Forest Plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following eight areas, which are noted at 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

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 §219.9.<sup>1</sup>
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under §219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern.<sup>2</sup>
5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.<sup>3</sup>
7. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> While 'focal species' is a new term introduced in the 2012 Planning Rule, the MNF has identified a species in the existing monitoring program that meets this requirement, thus this requirement will be met.

<sup>2</sup> At this time, species of conservation concern have not been identified for the MNF; therefore, the Forest Plan monitoring program transition does not address species of conservation concern.

<sup>3</sup> The MNF currently measures numerous 'other stressors' including insects, disease, invasive species, wildfire, and more.



8. The effect of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

The MNF already includes the eight required elements in the existing Forest Plan monitoring program. Thus, no new questions were added to the monitoring plan. However, two monitoring questions were dropped from the monitoring program due to the questions no longer being required by the 2012 Planning Rule. In addition, another six questions have been reworded, modified, or updated to clarify the monitoring question or better comply with the Planning Rule.

The 2012 Planning Rule also changes the publication of the Monitoring and Evaluation Report from an annual to biennial publication. Our first biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Report is expected by May 2018.

### **Public Involvement and Notification**

In accordance with direction (36 CFR 219.16(c)(6)), changes to the monitoring program can be made through an administrative change but only after public notice of the intended changes. The following opportunities have been provided for the public:

- A public notification letter (dated September 16, 2015) was posted on the MNF internet website homepage on September 17, 2015. The letter identified the Forest's intent to address the eight mandatory monitoring elements and modify the Forest Plan's monitoring program. No comments or interest from the public was received.
- A 30 day public notification and comment (March 23 through April 22, 2016).
  - The following information was posted to the MNF internet homepage on March 23, 2016:
    - Invitation Letter to Comment dated March 22, 2016.
    - Proposed changes to Chapter IV of the Forest Plan along with a summary of the proposed changes.
  - The Invitation Letter to Comment dated March 22, 2016, was also mailed to 148 entities including partners, other agencies and interested publics.
  - Comments were received from two respondents. The respondents suggested additional data collection be included for monitoring question #42 "To what extent is Forest management beneficially or detrimentally affecting the physical conditions of aquatic ecosystems, including riparian ecosystem function and health. After carefully considering these comments and reviewing the existing monitoring indicators, no changes to proposed monitoring questions, indicators, or monitoring program were made.

**Implementation**

This action is not subject to administrative review as it is considered an administrative change to the Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.139(c)).

Administrative Change #1, Chapter IV Monitoring and Evaluation (May 2016), goes into effect immediately upon posting this notification on the Forest internet website.

Should you have any questions about the Monitoring Program changes or the process, please contact Karen Stevens, Forest Planner, at [karenlstevens@fs.fed.us](mailto:karenlstevens@fs.fed.us) or 304-636-1800 ext. 233. Thank you for your interest in the Monongahela National Forest.

Sincerely,



CLYDE THOMPSON  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosures