



File Code: 1920
Date: May 9, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

I am approving administrative changes to the forest plan monitoring program associated with the 2010 Boise National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) to comply with the Forest Service's 2012 planning rule.

1. Background

The 2012 planning rule, codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (36 CFR 219), guides forest plan monitoring across the Forest Service. All forest plan monitoring programs are required to conform to the planning rule by May 9, 2016. The strategy we used to identify the modifications focused on addressing the purpose of the forest plan monitoring program as described in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(1), which includes the need for monitoring information that will enable the responsible official to determine if a change in plan components is necessary.

As required by 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5), each forest plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following eight requirements:

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 § 219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conservation of proposed and candidate species, and maintenance of a viable population 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 (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).

This administrative change is a modification to monitoring elements found in Chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. We retained those elements of the original monitoring program that addressed the



eight requirements listed above, developed new elements where needed to address the eight requirements, and deleted elements that did not address the eight requirements.

The Forest Plan monitoring program sets plan monitoring questions and associated indicators. Monitoring questions and associated indicators are designed to inform management of resources in the plan area, including testing assumptions, tracking changes and measuring management effectiveness and progress toward achieving or maintaining the plan's desired conditions or objectives. Questions and indicators are based on one or more desired conditions or objectives or other components in the plan. Not every plan component needs to have a corresponding monitoring question.

Under the 2012 planning rule, the Forest Plan monitoring program consists of monitoring questions and associated indicators to evaluate if plan components are effective and appropriate, and if management is effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward desired conditions and objectives for the plan area. Additional information for implementing the Forest Plan monitoring program may be documented in a separate monitoring guide that would, for example, identify methods for data collection, how the data are stored, and responsibilities for managing monitoring information. The monitoring guide would not be part of the Forest Plan and could be changed as needed.

Forest plan monitoring information will be evaluated every two years. The monitoring evaluation report must indicate whether or not a change to the plan, management activities, the monitoring program, or a new assessment, may be warranted based on the new information. The monitoring evaluation report must be used to inform adaptive management of the plan area. The expected publication date of the first biennial monitoring evaluation report is expected to be no later than two years from the date of this letter of approval.

2. Public Comment and Forest Service Responses

The 30-day public comment period began on March 30, 2016 with posting a public notice and comment letter describing the proposed monitoring realignment plan on the Boise National Forest website. Additional information provided on the website included the draft Chapter IV Monitoring Plan. Comments were received from Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and tribal representatives of the Watershed Division of the Nez Perce Tribe.

The Nez Perce Tribe and Boise National Forest have been working collaboratively on watershed/aquatic ecosystem and protection projects since 2008. Watershed restoration under this collaborative effort will continue to work toward restoring and protecting watersheds/aquatic ecosystems and fisheries resources that provide direct benefits to Nez Perce treaty lands and contribute to the accomplishment of restoration objectives under the Forest Plan.

In their comments, tribal representatives specifically requested access to monitoring data collected within the upper South Fork Salmon watershed and involvement in the evaluation of this monitoring information to support our collaborative efforts for restoration. I am committed to providing access options to monitoring information and subsequent evaluations to help inform our ongoing collaborative restoration efforts with the Nez Perce Tribe, as well as access to all

parties interested in restoration of resources on National Forest System lands. Thus, in response to this comment, I am directing my staff to develop options with our partners and interested parties that will fulfill this need. My goal is to have this operational by calendar year 2017.

IDF&G also works collaboratively with the Boise National Forest in support of mutually beneficial restoration objectives. As identified in their comments, they believe vegetation-based habitat models identified as an indicator to address monitoring questions often fail at predicting a wildlife species' distribution and abundance because vegetation is a poor proxy for presence and absence of a species (Cushman et al. 2008). Thus, they recommended a more robust set of focal species be used at the fine-scale in place of predictive models where those models have not been rigorously tested and verified.

I am directing my staff to initiate a collaborative effort to develop a systematic approach for identifying and prioritizing an additional subset of species for fine-filter assessment and monitoring in 2017. As part of this effort, the need for identifying when a measurable change in either focal species or species of conservation concern should initiate reviews of management strategies in the Forest Plan to determine whether a need for change is warranted (Schultz et al. 2013) will be considered.

In addition to the adjustments identified in my response to comments described above, I am committed to continuing the Forest's collaborative work with all interested federal, state, county and tribal governments, as well as other interested parties and individuals, interested in the Boise National Forest's monitoring program that has been realigned to address the eight requirements identified at 36 CFR 219.12(a) (5).

3. Approval of Monitoring Realignment

Based on the proposed realignment discussed in my March 30, 2016 letter requesting public comment and, incorporating changes suggested by commenters on this proposal and Boise National Forest resource specialists, I approve the administrative change for the monitoring plan modification, effective as of the date this letter is posted on the Boise National Forest website at:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/boise/landmanagement/planning>

The attached, modified plan monitoring program is now included in Chapter IV of the Forest Plan, and is consistent with the 2012 planning rule.

If you have questions about the administrative change or would like more information, please contact Randall Hayman (rhayman@fs.fed.us or (208) 373-4157)). Thank you for your interest in the management of the Boise National Forest.

Sincerely,


CECILIA R. SEESHOLTZ
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure: Boise National Forest Plan, Chapter 4, Monitoring Plan

Cc: Randall Hayman, Forest Planner