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**File Code:** 1940  
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Dear Interested Party:

If you are interested in changes to the monitoring program that accompanies the Allegheny National Forest (ANF) Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan), please read on.

On February 29, 2016, we invited you to review and comment on the draft updated Forest Plan monitoring program. We had reviewed and proposed changes to the monitoring program in order to bring it into compliance with new planning regulations, the 2012 Planning Rule. This “transition” to the 2012 Planning Rule monitoring requirements was focused only on the Forest Plan monitoring program, and did not include review or changes to Forest Plan components (desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines, and suitability of areas for resource management).

The 2012 Planning Rule requires monitoring programs to address the following:

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 ecological conditions.
4. The status of a select set of ecological conditions that 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.
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.
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 USA 1604(g)(3)c)).

Three new monitoring questions were presented in the draft updated monitoring program to address 2012 Planning Rule monitoring requirements. Specifically, questions were developed to measure changes on the ANF related to climate change (length and timing of the growing season) and monitor the status of focal species to assess select ecological conditions (brook trout-quality cold-water ecosystems and pileated woodpecker-large dead, damaged, and disease trees across the landscape). We also modified how some of the monitoring questions were asked and removed other monitoring questions. The monitoring questions removed were no longer relevant to the management of resources on the ANF, resulted in redundancy in our monitoring and evaluation efforts, or will be addressed through other efforts.



In consideration of the comments we received on the draft updated monitoring program, we made three additional modifications to the monitoring program. First, we modified an existing question to include the evaluation of the distribution of early structural, late structural, and old growth habitat. Under the draft updated monitoring program, we evaluated only the amount of these habitat types and not their distribution across the landscape. Second, we added a new monitoring question to address the status of visitor use and visitor satisfaction. This is a requirement of the 2012 Planning Rule that was not adequately addressed in the draft updated monitoring program. Lastly, we removed the monitoring question that addressed development of a state and federal agency working group to coordinate policies and processes regarding the management of oil and gas resources and infrastructure on the ANF. Such a working group does not promote collaboration with key stakeholders.

We have approved and finalized the updated monitoring program pursuant to the administrative change process ((36 CFR §219.13(c)). The final updated monitoring program is posted here: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/allegheny/landmanagement/planning>. New information gathered through the monitoring program will be evaluated every two years and a written report of the evaluation will be made available. We expect to publish our first evaluation report under the updated monitoring program by September 30, 2017. This report will be inclusive of the monitoring information collected during our fiscal years 2014 and 2015 as well as the monitoring information we will collect through the current fiscal year, 2016.

If you have any questions, please contact Collin Shephard at (814) 728-6142 or [collinmshephard@fs.fed.us](mailto:collinmshephard@fs.fed.us).

Thank you for your interest in the ANF.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Sherry A. Tune*

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