

## GMUG National Forests Forest Plan Revision

# Comprehensive Evaluation Report

## Introduction

The Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER) is one element of the Forest Plan revision process. This document is one of several planning documents that comprise a suite of documents that constitute the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest Plan. The GMUG National Forest plan revision is being completed under the provisions of the 2005 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) that require an evaluation report to enable the GMUG Forest Supervisor (Responsible Official) to decide if and where there is need for change in the current Forest Plan.

The evaluation report provides information on current resource conditions and trends, factors affecting the current conditions, factors causing conditions to change, and factors that have influenced the implementation of the current Forest Plan. That plan was completed in September 1983 and later amended in 1991 and 1993.

For the purposes of the GMUG Forest Plan revision, the evaluation report is comprised of three separate documents. This document is to a degree a summary of the required information to determine if there is a need for change in the 1983 Forest Plan. There is also a companion document that evaluates social and economic factors to be considered in the planning process. Both are supported by a four volume (Human Dimensions, Terrestrial Resources, Minerals, and Aquatic Resources) Comprehensive Assessment. The Comprehensive Assessment (CA) is a detailed, data-rich compilation of resource information looking at current conditions, trends, factors influencing resource conditions, and other factors related to resource management efforts on the GMUG. The CER documents distill information contained in the CA to provide summaries of conditions and trends for the key elements that could potentially affect a need for change.

This report presents the information for a management review process (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 24.1) in a brief narrative format with supporting tables and figures that summarize much of the information contained in the CA. This report provides a “first-cut” at six important evaluation elements: (1) the **desired conditions**, (2) the difference between current conditions or current plan direction and the desired conditions (**Conditional Gap**), (3) the **management implications** of closing or lessening that gap, (4) the **risks and uncertainties** that may exist in attaining the desired conditions, (5) the **need for change** from the current Forest Plan, and (6) an initial assessment of **performance measures**, those resource elements that track progress towards achieving desired conditions.

### Report Format

This report is divided into three sections, each covering key resource elements for Human Dimensions, Aquatic Resources, and Terrestrial Resources. The evaluation of social and economic factors is contained in Appendix C – Social and Economic Overview. This

overview of social and economic elements covers demographics, employment, income, local economic dependency, timber industry, livestock industry, and energy minerals industry. While this overview of social and economic factors is part of the comprehensive evaluation report, this information is incorporated into the Forest Plan revision process through the resource elements based on the effects resource management guidance has on these different social and economic components.

For each of the key resource elements there is a summary of conditions and trends with accompanying management review evaluations. Definitions for the six evaluation elements (listed above) and a brief description of how those evaluation elements were developed are discussed below. These evaluation elements help to provide the public and the Responsible Official with a summary review of conditions and trends and factors affecting management that may be addressed in the Forest Plan revision process. Not all of the resource elements that contribute to the GMUG National Forest ecosystems are covered in this evaluation because not all resource elements have applicability to the Forest Plan revision process. The elements addressed in this evaluation were deemed to have some effect on the need for change or revision in the Forest Plan.

**Desired Conditions:** These statements of desired conditions are preliminary in nature in that they will continue to be refined throughout the Forest Plan revision process.

Additionally, they do not attempt to integrate other resource elements in a multiple-use perspective. While narrowly focused, the preliminary desired condition statements do represent overarching objectives for the specific resource element. The factors that were considered in the formulation of the desired conditions in this CER include the principles of ecological sustainability, agency policy, and public input obtained in a collaborative process that entailed workshops, meetings, and working group meetings that have preceded this step in the plan revision process.

**Condition Gap:** This is the difference between current or existing conditions and the desired conditions. In some situations, this difference or gap can be a physical difference or a procedural difference. Procedural gaps are generally the result of new rules, laws, regulations, agreements, scientific findings, or policies that have gone into effect since the completion or amendment of the current Forest Plan. Physical gaps may be a result of not fully implemented desired conditions or plan direction from the current Forest Plan (1983), or where the resource conditions have progressed to a state or level that is outside of the preliminary desired conditions. The gap may also relate to a fundamental shift in social preferences toward land use and resource management.

**Management Implications:** These include a preliminary assessment of the potential procedural steps, timeframes, costs, or trade-offs associated with achieving the desired conditions for the specific resource element (e.g., eliminating the gap between current conditions and desired conditions). These potential management implications help decisions makers balance resource management program adjustments necessary to meet the various trade-offs needed to meet multiple-use mandates. Additionally, the management implications may help to redefine desired conditions as part of the Forest Plan revision process.

**Risks and Uncertainties:** These are the aspects of resource management choices that present risk or uncertainty in achieving the desired conditions. For example, if there is

management discretion between selecting active management versus passive management direction, the risks may vary. These risks generally relate to naturally occurring events that can affect the specific resource element or challenges to attaining desired conditions due to administrative or legal constraints that may impede management activities or impede implementation of projects. Additionally, the uncertainty may be a result of limited information or the limitations associated with resource analysis data that inhibit prediction of outcomes.

**Need for Change:** This is a preliminary identification of which components must be added, eliminated, or modified in the Forest Plan revision. This part of the evaluation proposes possible changes in the current Forest Plan direction that would help facilitate achieving desired conditions or eliminate identified procedural gaps. These preliminary “need for change” statements provide the foundation for the next level of public and agency collaboration on how the Forest Plan revision should address changes in desired conditions, objectives, suitability, guidelines, special areas, or monitoring.

**Performance Measures:** This is the initial screening of resource elements that could potentially be tracked to determine if desired conditions have been met or if resource conditions have changed. Some of these performance measures will help to define key aspects of the Monitoring Plan (part of the Forest Plan revision) and contribute to annual monitoring report content, as well as the five-year evaluation process required by the 2005 Planning Rule.

### Existing Forest Plan

The 1983 GMUG Forest Plan focused on management prescriptions in a spatial context providing land use, activity preferences, or emphasis for specific areas. This set of management area direction included the range of multiple use activities generally associated with National Forest System (NFS) lands. The GMUG lands were broken out into units where the management emphasis included:

- Developed Recreation (1A)
- Winter Sports (1B)
- Utility Corridors (1D)
- Semi-primitive Motorized Recreation (2A)
- Roaded Natural and Rural Recreation (2B)
- Semi-primitive Non-motorized Recreation (3A)
- Wildlife Habitat (4B)
- Aspen Management (4D)
- Big Game Winter Range (5A and B)
- Livestock Grazing (6A and B)
- Wood Fiber Production (7A)
- Wilderness (8A, B, and C)
- High Density Day-use Recreation (8D)
- Research Natural Area (10A)
- Special Interest Area (10C)
- Municipal Watersheds (10E)

While these management area prescriptions were intended to define the general management direction and emphasis for those areas, they were often misinterpreted to create a prioritization for single-use management, rather than recognizing the multiple-use or integrated management activities required to sustain healthy forests.

The 1983 GMUG Forest Plan also identified expected outcomes or production levels (output) by management activity or resource component. The Plan applied terms of yield by projecting expected increases or decreases. For many resource components these expected outcomes were defined in measurable units (e.g., visitor use, skier days, acres of wilderness, permits or leases issued, AUMs, jobs, and income), but for other components there was an identified percent of change expected. The 1983 Plan provided quantified expectations; unfortunately, many of these resource components lacked sufficient baseline data to calculate percent of change when comparing current conditions to Plan expectations.

The information and data compiled in the CA has shown that often the 1983 GMUG Forest Plan expectations were not met and much of the desired management area direction was never fully implemented. This is evident in many of the wood fiber production units (7A) where timber harvesting was not initiated nor were most of the associated facilities constructed (e.g., roads). Additionally, certain amenity based values such as recreation opportunity spectrum (ROS) were not addressed as expected outcomes or as management objectives of the plan, but rather included as inventory data describing conditions within the management areas or the GMUG National Forest collectively.

For these reasons and more importantly, due to changing public values, uses, and needs, as well as economic and resource conditions, the majority of the 1983 GMUG Forest Plan management direction and emphasis needs change. This document attempts to summarize those needs for change based on the analysis of existed conditions and preliminary desired conditions.