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To: File

The purpose of this letter is to make administrative changes to the Cleveland National Forest Land Management Plan (LMP) monitoring program. This important program supports an adaptive land management planning process that measures management effectiveness and progress toward achieving or maintaining the plan's desired conditions.

The Forest Service adopted new planning regulations (planning rule) in April 2012, pursuant to the National Forest Management Act. The planning rule requires that existing monitoring programs be changed to meet 8 specific monitoring criteria (36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)):

- (i) The status of select watershed conditions.
- (ii) The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
- (iii) The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under § 219.9.
- (iv) 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.
- (v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
- (vi) Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
- (vii) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
- (viii) 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)).

The existing monitoring framework for the Cleveland National Forest (Land Management Plan, Part 3, Appendix C) was last changed in 2014 to comply with a court-ordered Settlement Agreement, independent of the planning rule. The changes I am now authorizing are mandated by the planning rule, which considers such actions to be administrative changes, as defined by 36 CFR 219.13. Administrative changes require public notice and opportunity for comment but do not require compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

The Cleveland National Forest is adding new monitoring questions for fire activity, non-native annual grasses, coast live oak, fire frequency departure, special uses, and streamflows. I am also adjusting the monitoring question for tree mortality and the indicator for Biological Resource Conditions (Goal 6.2). I am adjusting the reporting frequency for all questions and indicators from every 5 years to every 2 years as mandated by the planning rule. Criterion (viii) applies only to National Forests with timber production programs, which the Cleveland National Forest



does not have. Therefore, no monitoring is needed for this criterion, and it has not been included in the new monitoring framework.

Management indicator species were included in the LMP for monitoring as an indicator of progress towards meeting Goal 6.2. Under the planning rule, focal species replace management indicator species. An interdisciplinary team reviewed potential focal species and selected non-native annual grasses and coast live oak. The combined set of seven existing monitoring questions and six of seven new or modified questions investigate ecological conditions that sustain at-risk species and target better indicators of progress towards Goal 6.2 than the habitat monitoring of management indicator species. Therefore, in conformance to the planning rule, I hereby remove all references to management indicator species from the Cleveland National Forest LMP.

The correction of two clerical errors from the 2014 changes are also included. All other components of the existing plan monitoring framework will be retained, including annual monitoring of selected projects and performance indicators (Parts 2 and 3 Monitoring).

The new monitoring framework and documentation of best available science required by the planning rule are available at:

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

On March 22, 2016, notification of the proposed changes was sent to a mailing list of 693 hard copy recipients, including Tribal representatives, who are typically interested in Cleveland National Forest land management issues. Notification was also sent to 9,455 email recipients who had mentioned monitoring during the 2012-2014 Southern California National Forest LMP Amendment process. Finally, the materials were made available on the Cleveland National Forest website.

Two comments were received during the 30-day comment period, both of which pertained more to project-level planning than plan monitoring. This decision authorizes no activities on-the-ground; instead it adjusts the information base for future decision-making. Therefore, comments pertaining to matters including dam removal, parking, road maintenance, and signage fall outside the scope of this decision.

One commenter pointed out that the new monitoring requirements are being addressed for an LMP developed under a different set of requirements. While this made the transition challenging, Forest Service policy (FSH 1909.12 Chapter 30) directs that “[m]odifying a plan's monitoring program does not require any other change to the plan; that is, a plan need not be amended nor revised simply to facilitate monitoring pursuant to the Rule.”

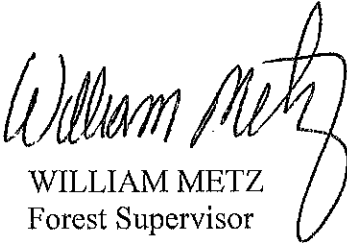
Regarding comments about the status of select watershed conditions, the first Watershed Condition Class Assessment for the Cleveland National Forest was conducted in 2010. Numerous measures of watershed condition were compiled into composite classes, and these classes are currently being re-evaluated. Streamflow characteristics are already included in this assessment process. The streamflow monitoring question and indicator added by this administrative change add detail to specifically address the need to monitor the effects of climate change.

Regarding comments about ecosystem integrity and diversity, the interdisciplinary team considered many potential focal species but came to the determination that the two selected focal species (non-native annual grasses and coast live oak) were the only currently suitable candidates. Other monitoring questions and indicators evaluate fire, forest health, invasive species, watershed and riparian condition, and at-risk species habitat condition, targeting processes that directly affect ecosystem integrity and diversity and are straightforward to monitor at the scale of the Cleveland National Forest.

Regarding comments about visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and recreation objectives, the National Visitor Use Monitoring program provides the only currently available and relevant data for the Cleveland National Forest. Stringent survey requirements and complex survey design make it infeasible for the Cleveland National Forest to initiate a new survey process. For particular sites, moreover, the input should be provided to the District Ranger for consideration of potential on-the-ground projects rather than broad-scale monitoring.

As documented here and in the planning record, this administrative change fulfills the monitoring transition requirements of the 2012 planning rule. This administrative change becomes effective upon signature below. Administrative changes are not subject to the objection process (36 CFR 219.50). This administrative change will remain in effect until the 2005 LMP is revised.

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