

# **San Juan National Forest Final Recreation Site Analysis**

## ***Questions and Answers***

### **1. What is the San Juan NF Recreation Site Analysis and Program of Work?**

The San Juan NF has finalized its Recreation Site Analysis (RSA) and Plan of Work for management of the Forest's 129 developed recreation sites, which range from trailhead parking areas, with very limited development, to full-service recreation facilities with intensive developments, such as drinking water, flush toilets, electrical, and sewage treatment facilities. The Final RSA is an analytical and advisory document intended to guide future management decisions of developed recreation sites toward long-term economic and environmental sustainability. Actions resulting from the RSA process may require formal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis prior to implementation, while others that do not constitute ground-disturbing actions may be implemented immediately or as soon as funding to do so becomes available.

### **2. How many sites will see no changes?**

Fifty-one of 129 sites would remain unchanged per the Final RSA; many of these are sites of high investment and are highly valued and heavily used by the public.

### **3. How many sites will receive improvements?**

Fourteen sites would undergo improvements and/or site equipment replacement.

### **4. How many will be closed/removed?**

Nineteen sites would be permanently closed or removed. These are typically sites with unwieldy maintenance requirements, low visitation, low ranked scores, or a combination of these factors.

### **5. How much money will the San Juan National Forest save in management costs of developed recreation sites?**

If fully implemented, the RSA recommendations would lead to savings of approximately \$35,000 per year in developed site operations and maintenance costs, or about 15% less than current costs.

### **6. Will those savings be adequate to sustain the program?**

The projected savings of 15% on annual operations and maintenance costs will not fully compensate for the overall budget reductions of almost 50% that the Forest has undergone over the last decade. However, when the projected savings are combined with other changes underway or planned, this level of cost reduction will make our goal of fiscal sustainability much more tenable over the next several years. More significant changes and/or reductions in developed-site services were highly disagreeable to many constituents, and as such, more severe reductions were not recommended.

**7. How much will implementation of the RSA recommendations cost the Forest?**

We estimated that full implementation costs over the next five years will be approximately \$294,000. This would include improvements, closures and other actions. Annual appropriations can be used to fund key projects with high potential return on investment, and additional funding sources are being pursued. Those projects involving more intensive ground disturbance will require some level of National Environmental Policy Act analysis, including the appropriate level of public involvement, prior to significant construction or site modifications.

**8. Will partnerships be able to maintain and operate toilets that cannot be fully funded otherwise?**

The toilets along the U.S. Highway 550 corridor on Molas and Coal Bank passes are expected to remain open under site-maintenance partnership(s) with local entities. However, if viable maintenance partnerships cannot be developed and implemented prior to January 1, 2018, the toilets would be removed.

During the RSA process, several external parties indicated an interest in assisting the San Juan NF in site maintenance/management agreements, particularly in order to keep the US Highway 550 corridor toilets operable and well-maintained. Initial discussions are being held, and further information will be forthcoming once details are available. Challenge Cost Share Agreements (CCS) are being researched as a possible method to undertake these partnerships, as are local non-profit organizations.

Whatever format is used to enable the partnership, it must be agreeable to potential partners and meet our objective of consistently clean and sanitary toilet facilities. Another option may take the form of a Collection Agreement, under which the USFS can accept external funding expressly for maintenance of agreed-to facilities. The Final RSA calls for permanently removing the roadside toilets on Coal Bank and Molas passes if partnerships are not in place and meeting agreed-upon goals by January 1, 2018.

**9. Can the public be assured that all the San Juan's toilets will be cleaned appropriately?**

Reducing the overall number of sites managed on the Forest is expected to free up staff and resources to focus on maintaining the highest value facilities to a higher standard.

However, the Final RSA does call for toilet-servicing frequencies to be reduced at 28 recreation sites across the Forest. Although we recognize that servicing mid- to high-use toilets less than weekly will not maintain sanitary and well-maintained facilities, the hope is that partnerships and other actions will focus funds and staffing on maintaining and servicing the most high-visibility and high-use toilets, while allowing flexibility to change service frequencies if conditions dictate.

**10. What will be the season of operations for the toilets along the US Highway 550 corridor on the passes between Durango and Silverton?**

If the Forest is successful in acquiring partnerships to help fund operations and maintenance of the Molas Pass and Coal Bank Pass toilets along the Highway 550 corridor, visitors should not expect changes in their overall operating seasons. Typically, these roadside toilets have opened in early May after snowmelt and closed in mid-September at the end of summer, when seasonal employees are no longer available to conduct routine maintenance.

**11. What changes will take place at the free-use camping area at Little Molas Lake?**

The free-use camping area will remain no cost, but the toilet in the Little Molas free-use camping area will be removed. Campers will be able to use the nearby toilet at the Colorado Trailhead, which would remain open until mid-September as it has in the past. This toilet is about 600 feet in walking distance from the free-use camping area. (For reference, a typical design layout for a fully developed and hosted fee campground would include a toilet within 300' walking distance from paid campsites, whereas these are free sites.)

**12. When will be the season of use for roads accessing Little Molas and Andrews lakes?**

No significant changes will be made to the operating seasons for Little Molas Lake and Andrews Lake recreation sites. The spur road leading from U.S. Highway 550 to Little Molas Lake and the Colorado Trailhead will remain open to motor vehicles from May 1 - Nov 30. The spur road leading to Andrews Lake is will remain open from June 1 – Nov 30. Toilets at these sites are typically opened in May after snowmelt, and are locked in mid-September as the summer season ends.

**13. How will the Cabin Canyon site and Ferris Campground be managed on the Dolores Ranger District?**

These sites will remain open to limited public access by the agency and/or partners providing only custodial maintenance to ensure public safety. The toilets will remain locked and will not be available for public use unless special arrangements are made in advance by groups with the local USFS office or a partnership with Dolores County is developed in which the county assumes maintenance responsibilities, which is being

pursued. No significant investments will be made in either site to replace or repair site facilities. It is anticipated removal will occur once the on-site facilities reach the end of their service life or become unsafe for public use.

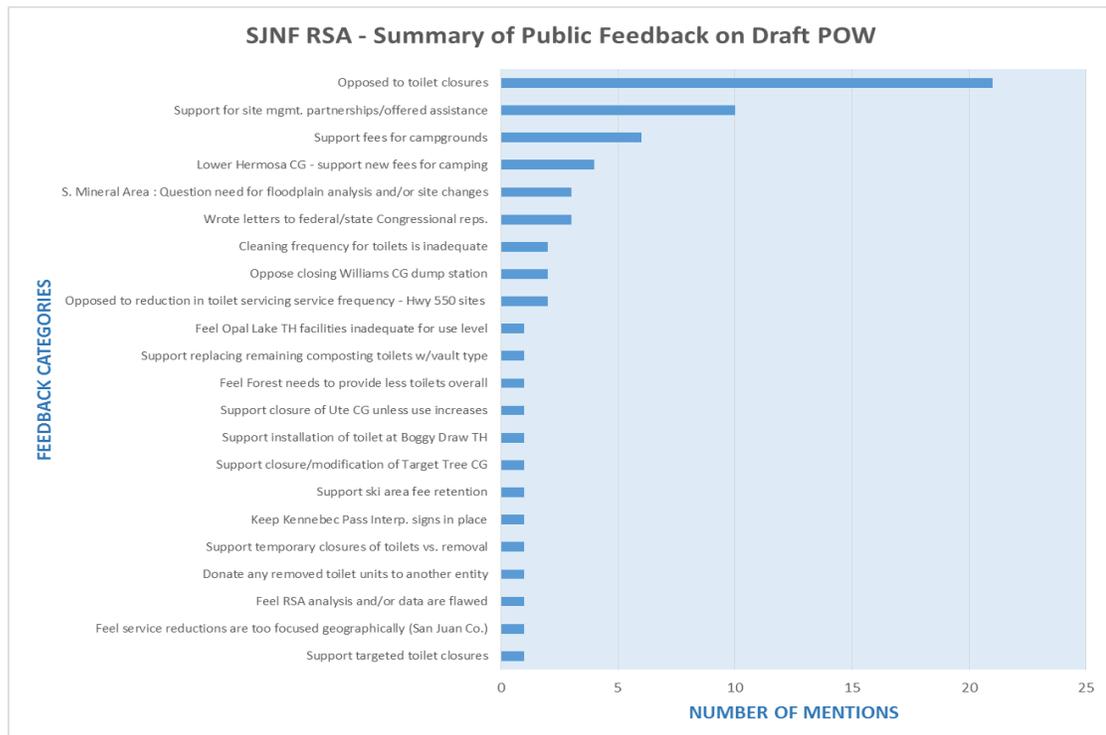
**14. Are any changes called for on the Pagosa Ranger District?**

Several site improvements are called for to improve overall public recreation opportunities, and public feedback regarding reductions called for in the Final RSA for the Pagosa District indicated that the recommendations are generally not viewed as adverse or significant.

**15. How was public feedback incorporated into the Final RSA?**

Public feedback was critical in ensuring the Final RSA would incorporate the interests of our constituents, visitors, and local governments. Early outreach and communication efforts in the spring of 2015 brought to light the most significant public concerns regarding site rankings and/or proposed changes. As a result, key changes were made iteratively prior to release of the Draft POW in January of 2016.

Up to and including the formal 60-day public feedback period on the Draft POW (Jan-March, 2016), 39 individual verbal or written responses were received. Public involvement was key to improving the Final POW and this interaction resulted in reasonable compromises that better reflect public desires. The resulting changes are highlighted within the RSA Final POW. Feedback is summarized in the chart below.



**16. When might changes called for in the Final RSA be made to recreation sites?**

Some minor actions can be undertaken immediately, as they entail administrative changes rather than ground-disturbing actions. Potential actions will be prioritized across the Forest and Districts, with some to occur as early as the summer of 2016. Appropriate National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) public notification and procedures will be followed prior to implementation for those actions that require it.

Any change that will cause ground disturbance will require some level of NEPA screening or formal analysis before construction or decommissioning could occur. Similar actions may be grouped under a single NEPA analysis dependent on complexity, while the most complex actions will likely be evaluated on a case-by-case analysis. Actions such as site removal, sewage vault installation, or site grading/excavating would require, at the minimum, a Categorical Exclusion; and if initial screening indicates impacts would occur, an Environmental Assessment (EA) would then be prepared to determine if the impacts are significant or not. It is anticipated that NEPA for key projects will begin shortly after release of the Final RSA to enable implementation work to occur as soon as possible.

**17. How are the RSA documents available to the public?**

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/sanjuan/RSA>.