

Record of Decision
USDA Forest Service

Lincoln National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan
Environmental Impact Statement

Chaves, Eddy, Lincoln, and Otero Counties, New Mexico

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents my decision approving a land and resource management plan for the Lincoln National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years. The Forest Plan will normally be revised in 10 years but must be revised in 15 years. Revision means the entire planning process will be repeated and a completely new plan prepared.

This Record of Decision briefly describes alternatives considered and rationale for the selected alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative and the most economically efficient alternative are identified. Mitigation and monitoring measures, implementation procedures, appeal rights, and Wilderness Study Area recommendations are described.

DECISION

I have selected the Proposed Action Alternative for management of the Lincoln National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

When compared to present management plans, the Forest Plan will:

- Construct one group camp and picnic ground, two winter sports areas, and an amphitheater. One campground will be improved.
- Provide for construction of one downhill ski area and expansion of two existing areas.
- Provide a higher level of maintenance at more developed recreation sites and on more trails.
- Increase access to the Forest by acquiring approximately 45 miles of rights-of-way.
- Increase protection of caves by gating, restricting access, and increasing law enforcement.
- Improve wilderness management by improving trailhead access, trail maintenance, and visitor information.
- Restrict wheeled motorized vehicles to open, designated roads and trails. Allow vehicles to travel up to 300 feet from roads and trails for dispersed camping only.
- Improve law enforcement with emphasis on better public education and preventing misuse of forest resources.

- Increase nominations of cultural resource properties to the National Historic Register.
- Recommend nonwilderness designation for the Guadalupe Escarpment Wilderness Study Area and three adjacent study areas administered by the Bureau of Land Management.
- Accelerate improvement of fish and wildlife habitats by managing for balanced successional stages of vegetation using commercial timber sales, fuelwood harvest, prescribed burning, coordination with other resource activities, and wildlife habitat improvements.
- Increase emphasis on conservation of State and Federal threatened, endangered, and sensitive species by managing habitats to permit removal of these species from the threatened and endangered lists.
- Emphasize control of insect and disease problems in the Sacramento Mountains and provide a more uniform distribution of timber size classes.
- Minimize construction of new roads. Construct two miles of road per year for new recreation facilities. Construct about 10 miles and reconstruct four miles of road per year for timber harvest activities. Obliterate 10 miles of road per year.
- Close more logging roads between harvest activities to prevent resource damage. One exception is a collector road to be constructed extending FR 64 from Sunspot to Board Canyon.
- Recommend establishment of three Research Natural Areas: William G. Telfer, Haynes Canyon, and North McKittrick.
- Accelerate improvement of rangeland grazing capacities by balancing permitted use with capacity.
- Maintain grazing capacity on past revegetation areas.
- Accelerate improvement of Forest-wide watershed conditions.
- Accelerate improvement of riparian habitat condition.

This alternative will provide quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service. Selection of an alternative which

emphasizes recreation opportunities and wildlife habitat while maintaining grazing capacity and a viable timber sale program is appropriate and balanced.

The Forest Plan provides direction for management of the Lincoln National Forest for the next 10-15 years. Direction is provided through a mission statement, goals, objectives, multiple-use prescriptions, and standards and guidelines. The Forest Plan contains sufficient detail to plan and carry out program level decisions. Additional environmental analysis will be completed for site-specific project proposals. No decisions for use of land or resources beyond the 10-15 year life of the plan have been made. The Plan does not address administrative operations such as personnel matters, purchasing, or organizational changes.

Wilderness Study Areas

The Guadalupe Escarpment Wilderness Study Area (21,300 acres) and three adjacent BLM areas (3,862 acres) were evaluated for wilderness suitability as directed by Congress in Public Law 96-550.

The four areas are recommended for nonwilderness in response to extensive public input and because they provide semi-primitive motorized recreation opportunities and a unique cave resource can be best protected and managed under nonwilderness designation. Under nonwilderness designation, the nonroaded portions will be maintained essentially in their present state. No developments are planned for the area aside from gates and other cave-protection devices, three miles of trails, and some wildlife and range improvements.

The Guadalupe Escarpment Wilderness Study Area and 5,300 acres to the north of it will be recommended for withdrawal from mineral entry and leasing.

The nonwilderness recommendation will receive further review by the Chief of the Forest Service, the Secretary of Agriculture and the President of the United States. Final decisions on wilderness or nonwilderness are the responsibility of Congress. A legislative environmental impact statement addressing this recommendation will be prepared by the Forest Service and forwarded to Congress. Wilderness recommendations are excluded from appeal as per 36 CFR 211.18(b)(3).

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Other alternatives considered in detail were:

Alternative A - No Action Alternative

Evaluates the effects of continuing current resource management. This is the No Action Alternative required by the National Environmental Policy Act regulations.

Alternative B

Strives to meet Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) objectives assigned in the Regional Guide.

Alternative C

Emphasizes sawtimber, fuelwood, permitted grazing use, and developed recreation all of which have market benefit values.

Alternative D

Emphasizes developed and dispersed recreation, including wildlife and wilderness, all of which do not have market benefit values.

Alternative E

Emphasizes silvicultural treatment of present insect and disease problems. Secondary emphasis is on developed recreation and wildlife habitat improvements in and adjacent to the treated areas.

Alternative F

Reflects the management emphasis in the Proposed Action, but provides outputs and services commensurate with a 30 percent lower budget.

Alternatives Considered, But Eliminated From Detailed Study

Numerous other alternatives were considered but eliminated from detailed study. Some were developed to determine effects of constraints and interrelationships of resource uses. Others determined individual resource capacities.

These alternatives and the reasons for eliminating them from detailed study are discussed in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Impact Statement.

REASONS FOR DECISION

My decision is based on evaluation to determine which alternative best provides quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service while maximizing net public benefits. Net public benefits are the long-term benefits less costs and are measured by both quantitative and qualitative criteria rather than a single measure or index.

Net public benefits and the quality of on-the-ground management were determined by evaluating how well each alternative responded to issues, by weighing environmental consequences as disclosed in the environmental impact statement, by assessing costs, and by considering public comments.

The Proposed Action Alternative is selected as the Forest Plan because it provides the highest level of issue resolution and is environmentally sound, although it is less economically efficient than three other alternatives. Of all the alternatives considered, it best balances competing and conflicting resource needs and public desires.

Issue Resolution

Although all of the alternatives provide multiple use benefits while protecting or enhancing environmental quality, issues are treated differently in each alternative and each alternative resulted in varying degrees of issue resolution.

Some issues are more critical than others, either because of potential resource damage or because the issue is highly controversial. Critical issues are: limited recreation facilities to meet increasing use; grazing of rangelands in unsatisfactory condition; need to establish timber production levels; uneven distribution of timber size classes; inefficient fire management program; widespread infestation of dwarf mistletoes and periodic outbreaks of western spruce budworm; Wilderness Study Area designation.

Other issues considered were: provision of fuelwood; dangerous abandoned mines; land ownership patterns and rights-of-way; inconsistency in law enforcement; transportation system management; and conflicting needs of local residents and regional users.

The selected alternative provides the best overall resolution of issues. It is highly responsive to the recreation, timber production, age class imbalance, fire, and insect and disease issues, as well as several of the less critical issues. Some other alternatives respond better to single issues, but do not respond to all issues as well as the selected alternative.

The selected alternative does not respond to fuelwood and range issues as well as other alternatives, but the differences are not significant enough to outweigh the overall performance of the selected alternative.

Most Economically Efficient Alternative

Present net value (PNV) is the primary economic criteria for comparing the economic efficiency of alternatives. Present net value is the difference between the discounted value of outputs having monetary value and total discounted management costs. PNV does not measure the nonpriced benefits of forest management, such as water quality, quality of recreation opportunities, and protection of forest resources from fire, insects, or disease.

Differences between PNVs are considered to be opportunity costs or trade-offs between alternatives. The selected alternative has a lower PNV than Alternatives B, D and E. However, the selected alternative provides additional nonpriced benefits. These nonpriced benefits outweigh the difference in PNV.

Additional nonpriced benefits of the selected alternative are:

- The selected alternative schedules timber sales in more of the mixed conifer forest to control insect and disease infestations. On the Lincoln National Forest, the cost of timber sale preparation exceeds priced benefits making the selected alternative less economic than alternatives with fewer timber sales. However, several nonpriced benefits result from applying silvicultural treatment to more acres: the opportunity to control the present insect and disease problem is greater, and more disease-resistant stands can be established; there will be greater improvement in the age class distribution benefiting wildlife, diversity and visual quality; and the long-term sustained-yield capacity of the lands suited for timber production is improved.
- The selected alternative provides higher quality recreation opportunities than Alternatives B, D, and E. It provides more emphasis on trail maintenance, wilderness management, and visitor information services which do not increase priced benefits.
- Fire and law enforcement protection are higher in the selected alternative. There are no direct priced benefits from protection programs, but potential losses of timber, recreation sites, and adjacent private property from fire or vandalism are reduced.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The selected alternative is the environmentally preferred alternative. Alternative D is equally acceptable based on overall environmental effects, but does not resolve issues as well. The selected alternative is environmentally preferred because it:

- Manages more land for insect and disease control than any other alternative, resulting in fewer potential losses. Timber harvest activities will minimize environmental impacts by implementing the Integrated Stand Management system.
- Emphasizes closing unneeded and poorly located roads and minimizing construction of new roads. The selected alternative schedules more road closures than any other alternative.

- Implements a new off-road vehicle policy to restrict motor vehicle use to designated open roads and trails only. This will benefit watersheds and wildlife.
- Emphasizes law enforcement. Stricter enforcement of regulations will reduce many detrimental uses of environmentally sensitive lands and promote better understanding among forest visitors of the need for environmental protection.
- Provides high level maintenance to developed recreation sites, dispersed recreation areas and trails.
- Develops the most new trailheads around the White Mountain Wilderness to improve access and better distribute use.
- Provides the most cave protection. Gating cave entrances and regulating visitor use will provide critically needed protection.
- Improves wildlife habitat management.

silvicultural practices were reduced by about half. The acres of steep ground to be harvested with a cable logging system were reduced from 14,313 to 5,479.

- Timber road construction was reduced. The miles to be constructed were reduced from 13 to 10 miles per year, while miles reconstructed increased from two to four miles per year.
- The monitoring section of the final Forest Plan was revised.
- Nominations of cultural sites to the National Historic Register were increased from one to two per year in the first five years, and one per year afterwards. Non-project cultural resource inventories were increased to 300-600 acres per year.

Numerous other suggestions and technical corrections were incorporated into the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Forest Plan. Detailed documentation can be found in the response document which accompanies the Final Environmental Impact Statement.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

The final Forest Plan reflects numerous changes from the draft plan. More emphasis is placed on dispersed recreation and wilderness management, trail maintenance, cultural resources, law enforcement and cave protection.

The public commented on the Proposed Plan and draft environmental impact statement in a number of ways. A total of 82 letters were received from individuals, organizations, businesses, the State of New Mexico, and other Federal agencies. In addition, a number of individuals attended a series of open houses, visited one of the Forest's offices, or telephoned to express opinions or ask questions. Forest personnel spoke to civic organizations, met with industrial interests, environmental groups, and State agencies, and hosted a radio talk show. Local newspapers published several articles about the Plan.

Changes because of public comments are:

- Standards and guidelines were revised to increase emphasis on recreation, law enforcement, and access to the Forest.
- The average annual allowable timber sale quantity was reduced from 18.9 million board feet (MMBF) per year (16.7 MMBF sawtimber and 2.2 MMBF products) to 16.0 MMBF per year (15 MMBF sawtimber and 1 MMBF products). The acres identified as suitable for timber production were reduced from 179,061 to 139,420. The acres to be treated with high intensity

MITIGATION

The following mitigation requirements for maintenance and enhancement of environmental quality are incorporated into the standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan:

- Recreation opportunities are provided with levels of service appropriate to the type and extent of use expected. Standards and guidelines will protect soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources.
- Visual quality is provided through the visual resource management objectives. Additional standards and guidelines provide direction to maintain or enhance visual quality as an integral part of other activities.
- Management and protection of cultural resources is assured through standards and guidelines that provide compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, and for coordination with State historic preservation planning. The Forest Plan will provide for Native American religious use and consultation.
- Improved wildlife habitat will be achieved through integration with other resource activities and habitat improvements. Viable populations of all native vertebrate species will be maintained. Habitats for State and Federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species will be managed with the objective to remove these species from their respective listings.

- Insect and disease conditions will be monitored on a continuing basis. Integrated forest protection methods will be used for prevention and control of insects and diseases as appropriate.
- Watershed protection and enhancement are provided for through "Best Management Practices" and cooperative balancing of livestock grazing use with capacity.
- Minerals and oil and gas activities will be managed through plans of operation to ensure environmental and other resource needs are protected while developing these needed resources.
- Standards and guidelines are included for the management of wildernesses and special areas recommended in the Forest Plan.

MONITORING

Implementation of the Forest Plan will be monitored as described in Chapter 5. The purposes of monitoring are to evaluate whether the Forest mission, goals, and objectives are being realized and to determine how effectively management standards and guidelines have been applied. At specified intervals, monitoring results will be evaluated. The results of monitoring and evaluation will measure progress on implementation and will help determine when amendments or revisions are needed.

IMPLEMENTATION

Continued public participation will be encouraged during implementation. Environmental analysis of site specific projects and monitoring activities will provide opportunities for public participation. Watershed condition, riparian condition, range condition, timber sales, and wildlife habitat are expected to maintain a high level of public interest.

The allowable timber sale quantity averages 16 million board feet (MMBF) per year (15 MMBF of sawtimber and 1 MMBF of products). The allowable timber sale quantity is the maximum amount of timber that can be sold during the 10-year life of the Plan, but is shown as an average annual figure because most people are more familiar with annual sale volumes. Actual annual timber sales may fluctuate, but the 10-year total cannot be exceeded except for salvage or sanitation sales of timber stands which are substantially damaged by fire, windthrow, other catastrophe, or which are in imminent danger from insect or disease attack.

The environmental analyses conducted for specific timber sales will provide opportunities for all interested parties to participate. Individual sales will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of other multiple use objectives. Individual timber sales may be sold where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet other multiple use objectives. Efforts will be made to reduce timber program costs through such measures as shared services, contracting, and implementing integrated stand management.

The budget for the Forest Plan is an estimated annual average budget for the 10-15 year life of the Plan. It is made up of broad averages and annual investment initiatives. Annual budget requests will be based on the Forest Plan. However, if appropriations are less than requested, modified rates of implementation and additional operating efficiencies will be examined so that planned on-the-ground results will be achieved. Individual projects will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of multiple use objectives prescribed in the Forest Plan. Individual projects may be implemented where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet multiple use objectives as established by the direction in the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Final Environmental Impact Statement appears in the Federal Register. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Forest Plan the first year of implementation. Existing projects as well as contractual obligations will continue as planned. As soon as practicable after approval of the Forest Plan, the Forest Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Forest Plan. Subsequent administrative activities affecting such lands, including budget proposals, shall be based on the Forest Plan. The Forest Supervisor may change proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and appropriated funds. Such scheduled changes shall not be considered a significant amendment to the Forest Plan. Changes significantly altering the long-term relationship between levels of multiple use goods and services compared to those projected under actual appropriations may be significant amendments.

The Forest Supervisor may amend the Forest Plan, but must determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the plan. If the change is determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor shall follow the same procedure as that required for development and approval of a Forest Plan. If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of National Environmental Policy Act procedures.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision, except for wilderness recommendations, is subject to administrative review in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be made in writing and submitted to Sotero Muniz, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service, 517 Gold Avenue SW., Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102, within 45 days from the date of this decision. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.



SOTERO MUNIZ
Regional Forester

07 21 1988

Date