



**File Code:** 1950  
**Date:** June 3, 2016

Interested Party,

I am approving administrative changes to the monitoring programs associated with the *Bighorn National Forest Revised Land and Resource Management Plan* (Forest Plan) in order to comply with the Forest Service's 2012 planning rule.

1. Background

The 2012 planning rule, codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (36 CFR 219), guides forest plan monitoring across the Forest Service. All forest plan monitoring programs are required to conform to the planning rule by May 9, 2016. The strategy we used to identify the modifications focused on addressing the purpose of the forest plan monitoring program as described in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(1), which includes the need for monitoring information that will enable the responsible official to determine if a change in plan components is necessary.

Each forest plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following eight requirements, which are noted at 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

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 the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 219.9.
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 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.
5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measurable 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 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).



This administrative change is a modification to monitoring elements found in chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. We retained those elements of the original monitoring programs that address the eight requirements listed above and developed new elements where needed to address those eight requirements. We removed elements that do not address the eight requirements. However, the Forest will continue monitoring for the removed elements and their monitoring items under our programmatic monitoring efforts, which are above and beyond the requirements of the Forest Plan.

Under the 2012 planning rule, the monitoring program will consist of only monitoring questions and associated indicators to evaluate if plan components are effective and appropriate, and if management is effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward desired conditions and objectives for the plan area.

The Forest Plan monitoring information will be evaluated every two years. The monitoring evaluation report must indicate whether or not a change to the Forest Plan, management activities, the monitoring program, or a new assessment, may be warranted based on the new information. The monitoring evaluation report must be used to inform adaptive management of the plan area. The expected publication date of the first biennial monitoring evaluation report is expected to be no later than two years from the date of this letter of approval.

## 2. Public Comment and Forest Service Responses

A 30-day public comment period began with the publication of a legal notice on March 30, 2016. In addition, the draft administrative change and a letter describing the proposed monitoring realignment plan was posted on the Bighorn National Forest website and sent to the Forest Plan Steering Committee, which was also provided with a presentation of how their feedback was considered.

A table of responses to public and agency comments can be found at:

[http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/bighorn/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fswdev3\\_009165](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/bighorn/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fswdev3_009165)

## 3. Approval of Monitoring Realignment

Based on the proposed realignment discussed in my March 30, 2016, letter requesting public comment and the comments that were received, and incorporating changes suggested by planning specialists at the Rocky Mountain Regional Office in Golden, CO, and an interdisciplinary team on the Bighorn National Forest, I approve the administrative changes for the monitoring plan modification. The modified plan monitoring programs included in the Forest Plan now align with the 2012 planning rule and are found in chapter 4 of the Forest Plan. Information specific to the monitoring realignment process can be found at:

[http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/bighorn/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fswdev3\\_009165](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/bighorn/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fswdev3_009165)

If you have questions about the administrative change or would like more information, please contact Christopher D. Jones, Planning Staff Officer, at christopherdjones@fs.fed.us or (307) 674-2627. Thank you for your interest in the management of the Bighorn National Forest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "William T. Bass". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'W' and 'B'.

WILLIAM T. BASS  
Forest Supervisor

CC: Trey Schillie