



File Code: 1920
Date: June 27, 2016

Dear Interested Public,

The 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219) requires the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (the Forest) to establish a land management plan monitoring program by May 9, 2016, or as soon as practicable, that is consistent with the new Planning Rule's monitoring requirements. We have reviewed our existing Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests Land and Resource Management Plans (Forest Plans) monitoring program (found on pages 5-1 to 5-20 in the Okanogan Plan Forest Plan and on pages V-1 to V-11 in the Wenatchee Plan Forest Plan) to determine what modifications are needed to conform to the new monitoring requirements. I wanted to take this opportunity to share our new monitoring program with you and request your input.

2012 Planning Rule

As defined by the 2012 Planning Rule, monitoring is continuous and provides feedback for the planning cycle by testing relevant assumptions, tracking relevant conditions over time, and measuring management effectiveness (36 CFR 219.12). The Planning Rule includes eight monitoring requirements.

- (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 propose 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) Measureable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
- (vii) Program 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 Forest's new Forest Plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the monitoring requirements. The monitoring questions are tied to specific Forest Plan components, which include desired future conditions, plan objectives, and standards and guidelines. They must focus on providing the



information necessary to evaluate whether Forest Plan components are effective and appropriate, and whether management is being effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward the desired conditions and objectives for the Forest. The monitoring questions in the Forest Plan were used as a starting point for developing the new Forest Plan monitoring program. Indicators are quantitative or qualitative variables that can be measured or described and, when observed periodically, show trends in conditions that are relevant to the associated monitoring questions.

Focal Species

Every Forest Plan monitoring program must identify focus species along with monitoring questions and associated indicators to track the status of the identified focus species in order to comply with monitoring requirements. Focal species are “a small subset of species whose status permits inference to the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs and provides meaningful information regarding the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area. Focal species would be commonly selected on the basis of their functional role in ecosystems” (36 CFR 219.19).

Management indicator species (MIS) in the existing Forest Plans, which are described on pages III-76, 77 in the Okanogan LRMP FEIS and on pages II-15,16 in the Wenatchee LRMP Forest Plan, were used as a starting point for identifying focal species. There is overlap between monitoring that takes place at the Forest level and regionally through the Northwest Forest Plan monitoring that looks at these questions at scales larger than one National Forest. Based on how well the species serve as indicators of ecological integrity and existing Forest Plan components, along with the anticipated time until completion of the Forest Plan revision, the following is proposed for the transition period.

- Continue to monitor the species listed in the current Forest Plans as interim focal species. In addition to these focal species, the Forest will report on several focal aquatic species, bighorn sheep, bats (little brown myotis and Townsend’s big eared bats), and pollinators.

The interim focal species for the Forest will be re-evaluated during the Forest Plan revision process and will likely change through that process based on the corresponding changes to Forest Plan components (e.g. standards and guidelines).

Administrative Changes

In order to implement the new Forest Plan monitoring program, the Forest would replace the existing monitoring programs described on Okanogan and Wenatchee National Forests Forest Plans found on pages 5-1 to 5-20 in the Okanogan Plan Forest Plan and on pages V-1 to V-11 in the Wenatchee Plan Forest Plan with the one attached.

The changes will be made using an administrative change under the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219). An administrative change (36 CFR 219.13(c)) is any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or plan revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statutory or regulatory requirements, or changes to other content in the plan, including the monitoring program (36 CFR 219.7(f)(iii)).

Forest Plan Monitoring Program

The Forest will prepare its first monitoring report under this new program in fiscal year 2017. The biennial monitoring evaluation report will use the indicators to answer the monitoring questions and evaluate the trends. The report will document whether a change to the Forest Plan or change to the monitoring program is warranted based on new information or whether there is no need for change at that time as required by the Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.5).

Tribal and Public Input

As required by the 2012 Planning Rule, a substantive change to the monitoring program made outside the process for plan revision or amendment may be made only after notice to affected tribes and the public of the intended change and consideration of public comment (36 CFR 219.16 (c)(6)). We invite your comments on these proposed administrative changes and the specific monitoring questions and indicators. These documents are available electronically at: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/okawen/monitoringplan.

The Forest would like your comments by August 1, 2016. Comments may be submitted to comments-pacificnorthwest-okanogan-wenatchee@fs.fed.us. Please send your written comments to:

Stuart Woolley
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801
FAX: (509) 664-9220

You may also hand-deliver your comments to the above address during normal business hours which are 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding federal holidays. All those who comment will remain on our Forest Plan Revision mailing list and receive future updates on this proposal. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment will be considered part of the public record for this project, available for public inspection, and released if requested under the Freedom of Information Act.

If you have any questions, contact the transition lead, Stuart Woolley, at 215 Melody Lane, Wenatchee, WA 98801, swoolley@fs.fed.us, or (509) 664-9332.

Thank you for your interest.

Sincerely,



MICHAEL R. WILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor

cc: Stuart Woolley