



United States Department of Agriculture

## CUSTER GALLATIN NATIONAL FOREST

# Forest Plan Revision



Forest Service

June 2016

# Topics



- ❖ Purpose of Webinar
- ❖ Format of Webinar
- ❖ Forest Plan Revision Overview
- ❖ Plan Revision Steps and Schedule
- ❖ Assessment Highlights
- ❖ Need to Change Highlights
- ❖ What is Next in Plan Revision

# Purpose of the Meeting



- ❖ Share some ***results to date*** of the Assessment of Existing Conditions
- ❖ Share some ***early ideas*** of the Need to Change the Existing Plans
- ❖ Virtual Conversation around what people care about and want to see for the Forest.

# Format of the Meeting



**We are trying something different**



Typical Forest Service dialogue with the public

Virtual Conversation by Webinar



# Why the Change?



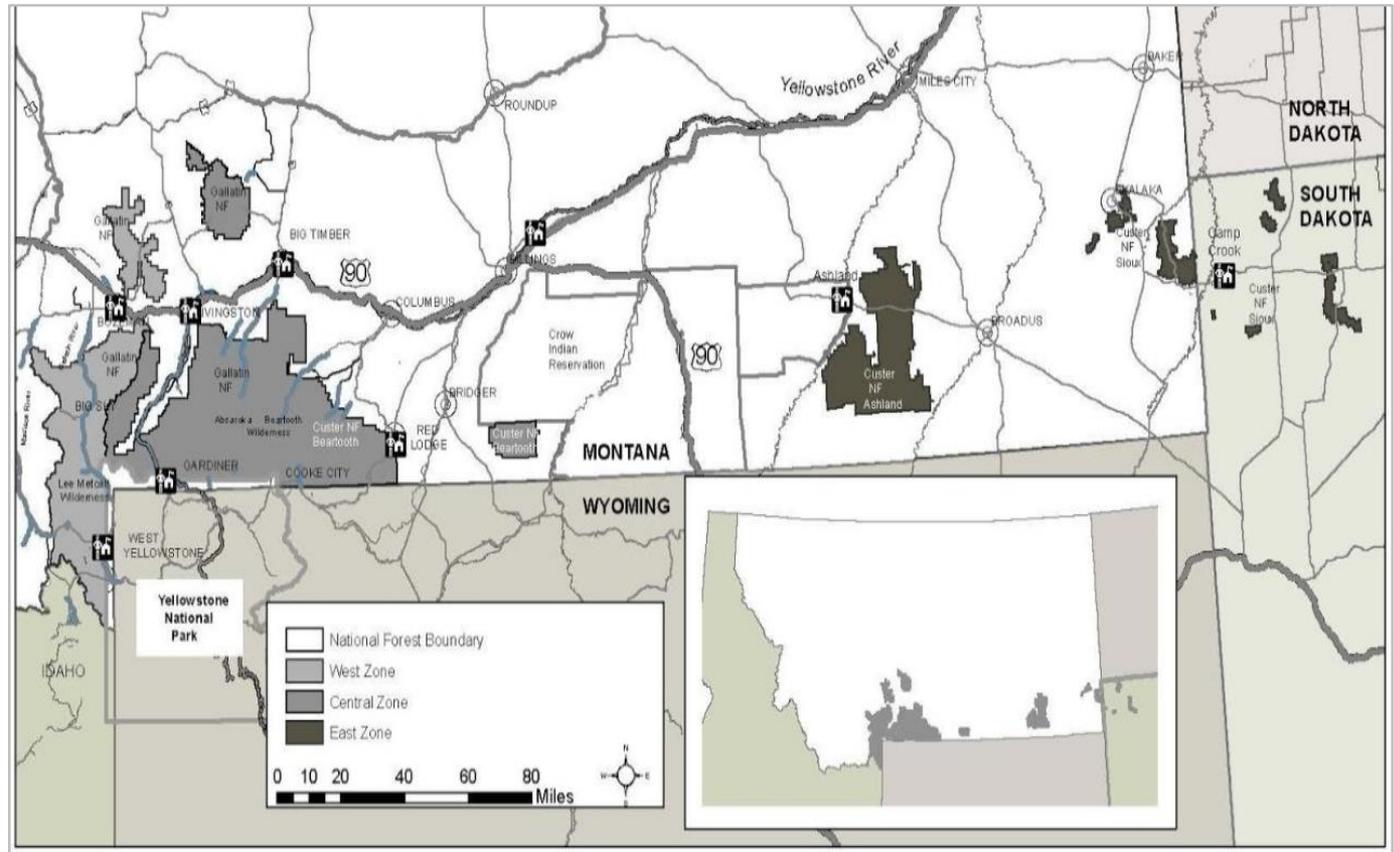
- We all see each other's perspectives.
- Shared learning about the Forest.
- Start to build the foundations for revising the Plan.
- The public's discussion helps us understand what people care about and want to see for their National Forest.
- Try out a virtual format which allows people to participate without travelling.

# Format of the Webinar



- ❖ 20 - 25 minute overview from the Forest Service
- ❖ Three rounds of small group breakout discussions.
- ❖ At the end of each of the three rounds, report from each break out group.
- ❖ General Q & A
- ❖ More detailed instructions at the end of the Forest Service overview.

# Custer Gallatin National Forest



Custer Gallatin National Forest  
From West Yellowstone MT to Camp Crook SD

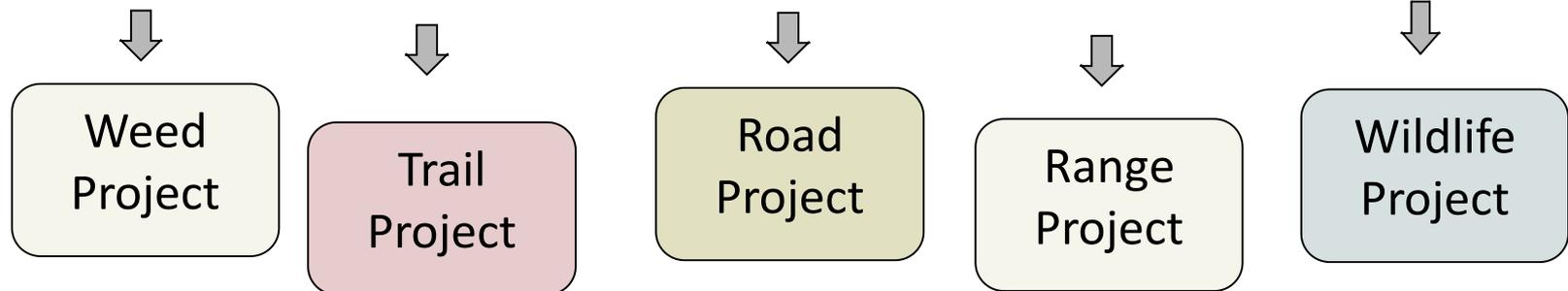
# What is a Forest Plan?

Forest Plan

- Comprehensive plan guiding forest management for 15+ years
- Guides **what** we do, **where** we do it and **how** we do it.
- The Forest Plan does not authorize site specific activities or prohibitions
- All subsequent proposals and projects must comply with the approved forest plan

Project

New Projects comply with the Revised Forest Plan and with Project NEPA



# Why Revise the Forest Plans? Who Decides?



- It's the law. The **National Forest Management Act (1976)** requires a Forest Plan, and periodic revisions.
- Two existing Plans for one Forest
- A lot has changed: population, bigger fires, new invasives, land exchanges, new technology, uses and interests.
- Decided By Forest Supervisor Mary Erickson, located in Bozeman, MT.

# Integration: the Land, the Law, People



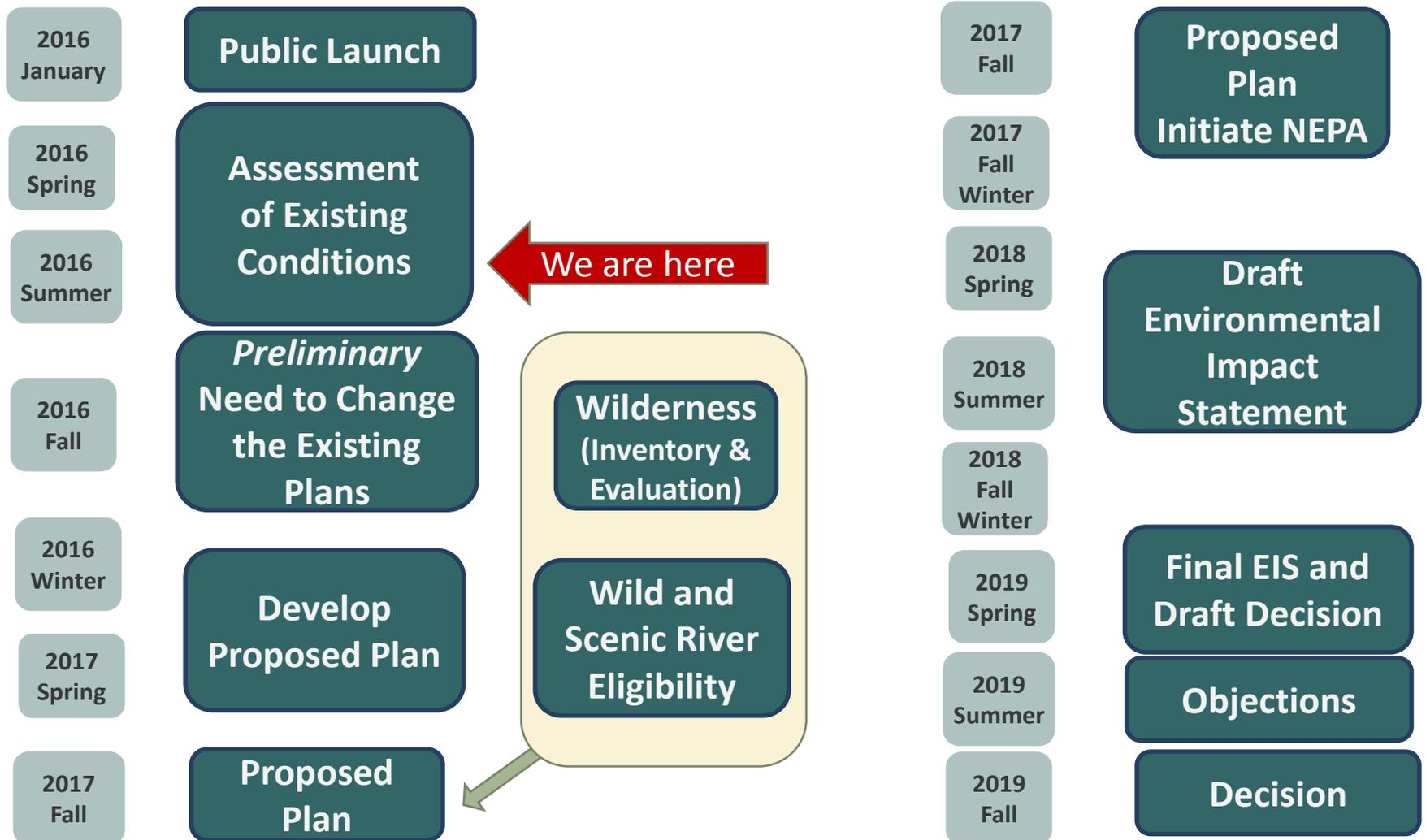
scenery social wildlife  
cultural soils tribal  
linkage nature air diversity timber  
plants fish integrity economic  
minerals riparian species  
forage land water historic  
energy recreation vegetation trails  
ecosystems services

Provide for  
**Ecological  
Sustainability**

and

Contribute to  
**Social and  
Economic  
Sustainability**

# Plan Revision Steps and Schedule



# Assessment and Preliminary Need for Change



- Assess 15 important ecological, social, and economic resource topics
  - What is out there?
  - What is the trend?
- Use of best available science, local information, national perspectives, and native knowledge
- Identify how the existing 1986 and 1987 Plans need to be revised (aka “Need for Change”)

# Plan Revision Assessment Topics

1. Terrestrial ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and watersheds
2. Air, soil, and water resources
3. System drivers and stressors (e.g. fire, invasives)
4. Baseline assessment of carbon stocks
5. Threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate species, and potential species of conservation concern
6. Social, cultural, and economic conditions
7. Benefits people obtain from the NFS planning area (ecosystem services)
8. Multiple uses (e.g. timber, grazing)
9. Recreation settings, opportunities and access, and scenic character
10. Renewable and nonrenewable energy and mineral resources
11. Infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors
12. Areas of tribal importance
13. Cultural and historical resources and uses
14. Land status and ownership, use, and access patterns
15. Existing designated areas (e.g. wilderness and wild and scenic rivers) and potential need and opportunity for additional designated areas



# Assessment Snapshot: Soil, Air and Water



- Soils vary widely. Soil productivity can be limited by cold soil temperatures, limited soil moisture, shallow soil depths, abundant rock fragments.
- Air quality is improving in some ways. Visibility is improving. Sulphur in the air is decreasing.
- Nitrogen deposited on land and water is increasing especially on the western portion of the Forest.
- Watershed condition is largely ‘properly functioning’. No watersheds are rated as ‘non-functioning’.
- Stream habitat conditions are largely holding steady or improving on the western part of the Forest.
- Native fish restoration is succeeding on the western part of the Forest, expanding ranges and stabilizing populations, particularly for cutthroat trout.

# Assessment Snapshot: Drivers and Stressors



- **Fire:** Many fires 1980 to 2015.
- **Fire:** Longer duration, large acreage fires may become more common with anticipated warmer, drier climate conditions.
- **Insects and disease:** insects such as pine beetle are always present to some degree, with cyclical outbreaks.

# Assessment Snapshot: Drivers and Stressors



- **Temperatures** are increasing. More extreme weather events are expected.
- **Noxious Weeds** occur on about 58,000 acres. Available resources allow annual noxious weed treatment from 3,000 to 4,000 acres.
- **Noxious Weeds:** Acreage infested by noxious weeds has doubled over the past 10 years.

# Assessment Snapshot: Vegetation



- Highly diverse vegetation from west to east; ranging from alpine tundra to grasslands. The Forest includes many types of conifer and deciduous trees.
- Large fires from 2000 to 2012 have resulted in non-forested areas.
- Whitebark pine is a candidate species under the Endangered Species Act. It is found at high elevations on the western part of the Forest.

# Assessment Snapshot: Vegetation



- Riparian areas are important Forest wide.
- Green ash woodlands are an important feature of the Sioux and Ashland Districts.
- Both riparian areas and green ash woodlands provide food and shelter for livestock and wildlife, slow erosion and water runoff, and furnish aesthetic value to recreationists.
- Baseline carbon stocks increased from 1990 to 2013. Carbon stocks were compiled using live trees, standing dead trees, down dead wood, understory, forest floor and soil organic carbon.

# Assessment Snapshot: Wildlife



- High terrestrial and aquatic species diversity.
- Well over 600 different species.
- Wildlife habitats are largely intact.
- Most species present prior to European settlement are still present today.
- Several species are on endangered species list (for example grizzly bear and Canada Lynx), and some species have recovered, for example bald eagles.

# Assessment Snapshot: Wildlife



- Elk populations have greatly increased on the eastern part of the Forest in the past 30 years.
- Bison tolerance has expanded outside Yellowstone National Park in both the Hebgen and Gardiner winter ranges.
- *Species of Conservation Concern*: new requirement of planning regulations. A draft list of *potential* species will be in the draft Assessment.

# Recreation, Infrastructure, Scenery



- 3.1 million annual visitors
- Activities include hiking, driving for pleasure, skiing, snowmobiling, biking, motorized trail use, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, camping, wildlife and bird viewing.
- The Forest permits 292 recreation residence cabin holders, three resorts, seven organization group camps, two privately operated alpine ski areas and two Nordic ski areas
- Highly diverse scenery.

# Recreation, Infrastructure, Scenery



- Infrastructure includes:

26 Recreation Rental Cabins

150 Trailheads

67 Campgrounds

11 Boating Sites

115 Day Use Areas

18 Interpretive Sites

25 Picnic Areas

1 Cave site: Big Ice Cave

1 Nordic Ski Area: Rendezvous

36 waste water systems

82 public water systems

324 toilets

2 Visitor Centers: Quake Lake  
and Main Boulder

68 buildings such as picnic  
shelters, bunkhouses, barns

- Recreation use is increasing while funding is static or decreasing.

# Assessment Snapshot: Timber, Grazing, Minerals



- 216 active and 18 vacant livestock grazing allotments; 199 grazing permit holders in nine counties and two states.
- About 36,200 head of cattle, 550 horses and 400 bison permitted to graze totaling 210,200 Animal Unit Months (AUMs).
- For a variety of reasons, AUMs permitted on the CGNF have decreased 23% since the 1986 Forest Plan timeframe.
- On a landscape scale, current rangeland conditions are considered satisfactory, given general site capabilities. At more site-specific scales, there continues to be actions implemented to improve conditions.

# Assessment Snapshot: Timber, Grazing, Minerals



- From 2011 to 2015, Custer Forest averaged about 3.2 MBF and Gallatin NF averaged about 5.4 MBF.
- Since 1980, the volume of sawtimber sold has decreased on the Gallatin NF, and remained relatively flat on the Custer NF.
- The number of Christmas tree permits has been increasing, the amount of firewood has varied.
- Mineral and energy resources include platinum and palladium, limestone, gravel, three oil and gas wells and two hydropower related facilities.
- Naturally occurring erionite, offretite and uranium, potentially represent health and safety concerns to humans.

# Social, Economic and Cultural Conditions



## Custer Gallatin NF Economic Analysis Area



Focuses on those counties most economically tied to the Custer Gallatin NF. Included counties with 1) Custer Gallatin NF lands, 2) counties between counties with Custer Gallatin NF lands to form a contiguous land block, and 3) counties with economic relevancy, close proximity with Custer Gallatin NF lands and/or having no other National Forest lands.

# Social, Economic and Cultural Conditions



- Increasing population overall, particularly Gallatin and Yellowstone Counties.
- Population growth or decrease highly variable by county.
- Significant expansion in service related industries relative to other industries, especially in Bozeman and Billings.
- The Forest contributes to travel & tourism, mining, grazing and timber related industries.
- Fifteen Tribal entities in six States

# Need to Change the Existing Plans



## Changes Required by the Planning Regulations *examples:*

- Create Desired Conditions
- Consider Connectivity and Climate Change
- Conduct Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Process
- Conduct Potential Wilderness Evaluation Process
- Species of Conservation Concern

# Need to Change the Existing Plans



## Need to make one consistent plan from two existing plans *examples:*

- The Gallatin Forest Plan updated direction for wildland fire management in 2011. The Custer Forest Plan has not updated wildland fire management direction since 1986.
- The two existing plans approach scenery management very differently.

# Need to Change the Existing Plans



## **Changed Conditions; Allow Flexibility; or Direction is Lacking** *examples:*

- Provide direction for newly acquired lands.
- Flexibility to address new technologies that may affect recreation opportunities.
- Flexibility to account for the change in status for federally listed species over time.
- Include management direction for non-vertebrate species.

# What Won't Change in Plan Revision



## Congressional Designations

The Forest Plan revision process cannot change boundaries or purposes of areas designated by Congress, such as Wilderness.

## Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs)

The Forest Plan revision process cannot change boundaries of IRAs.

## Site Specific Travel Decisions

A Forest Plan does not make designations such as selection of roads and trails where motorized or mechanized vehicle trail will be allowed, restricted or prohibited.



# Next Steps: 2016



February  
March

Introductory  
Community  
Meetings

Spring

Forest Service  
Prepares  
Assessment and  
*Preliminary*  
Need to Change  
the Plans

June

Community  
Conversations  
Results to Date  
Assessment and  
*Preliminary*  
Need to Change  
the Plans

Early Fall

Draft Assessment  
Draft *Preliminary*  
Need to Change the Plans  
Available for Review

Fall

Final Assessment  
*Preliminary*  
Need to Change  
the Plans

Winter

Begin  
Creating  
Revised  
Plan



# For more information...



**Mailbox:**  
[cgplanrevision@fs.fed.us](mailto:cgplanrevision@fs.fed.us)

**Website:**  
[www.fs.usda.gov/custergallatin](http://www.fs.usda.gov/custergallatin)  
and click on upper right-hand  
quick link labeled Forest Plan  
Revision

The screenshot shows the website for the Custer Gallatin National Forest, part of the USDA Forest Service. The page is titled "Custer Gallatin Forest Plan Revision" and features a main heading: "Involvement in the Custer Gallatin Forest Plan helps to create a vision for the surrounding National Forest System lands for the coming decade." Below this, there are two prominent links: "Public Involvement Page," and "Public Meeting Dates June 14 - 30, 2016".

The left sidebar contains a search bar and a navigation menu with categories such as "Site Map", "Custer Gallatin National Forest", "Home", "Special Places", "Recreation", "Alerts & Notices", "Passes & Permits", "Maps & Publications", "Land & Resources Management" (with sub-items: Planning, Projects, Resource Management), "Learning Center", "Working Together", "About the Forest", "News & Events", and "Contact Information".

The right sidebar includes "Quick Links" (Planning Rule (2012), Custer or Gallatin Existing Forest Plans and Documents, National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Initiation of Assessment, Federal Register Notice, National Forest Management Act (NFMA), U.S. Forest Service National Planning Rule Revision) and "Related Links" (Guide: State, Local & Tribal Governments, Forest Plan Revision; Citizens Guide to Forest Planning).

At the bottom, there is a "Subscribe Below" section with the text: "Subscribe to Email Updates. To sign up for updates or to access your subscriber preferences, please enter your contact information below."



End