

Reader's Guide to Understanding the Francis Marion Draft Forest Plan

We have just released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Land Management Plan (commonly called a forest plan) for the Francis Marion National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has been working on this draft forest plan for three years and many of you have already been involved. These documents are available for review, either by viewing them on our plan revision website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/scnfs/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5393142>, on compact disk, or as a printed copy. You can request a CD or a printed copy of the forest plan by emailing FMPlanRevision@fs.fed.us or calling 803-561-4000.

This is an important step in the process of revising our management direction. We have worked hard to develop these draft documents, incorporating many ideas that we heard in community meetings, and from groups and individuals. We have identified Alternative 2 as the USFS's Preferred Alternative, based on what we have heard from people, analysis of the alternatives, and where we think a reasonable resolution of issues falls. The identification of the preferred alternative is not a decision. It represents our current thinking based on what we have learned so far.

Now we need your help in reviewing and commenting. Here are a few tips that may help:

- Start by looking at this “Reader’s Guide to Understanding the Francis Marion Draft Forest Plan” and its two companion documents “Commenter’s Guide” and the summary on the Francis Marion National Forest Draft Forest Plan.

Overview of the Draft Forest Plan

On the CD and the Planning Website, you will see 4 documents:

- [Cover Letter from Forest Supervisor Rick Lint](#)
 - [Draft Forest Plan](#)
 - [Draft Environmental Impact Statement \(DEIS\)](#)
 - [DEIS Appendices](#)
- **The Cover Letter** is an invite to comment on the draft forest plan from the Responsible Official, Forest Supervisor Rick Lint.
 - **The Draft Land Forest Plan** describes management direction for the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative is Alternative 2 in the DEIS. The draft forest plan is divided into 4 chapters and appendices A-G, as follows: **Chapter 1** provides an overview of the Francis Marion forest plan. **Chapter 2** outlines the desired conditions and objectives at the forestwide level; for management areas (Management Areas 1 and 2) and for geographic areas (Resource Integration Zones). These terms are described later in this document. **Chapter 3** lists standards and guidelines that establish sideboards for framing management

activities and ensure resource protection. **Chapter 4** describes the plan's adaptive management strategy and monitoring program to determine whether projects meet the management direction in the forest plan. **Appendices A-G** provide supporting information. Appendix G is a glossary of terms.

- **The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS)** describes the 3 alternatives considered in detail: **Alternative 1** represents the current forest plan and is also referred to as the 1996 plan. **Alternative 2** is the alternative preferred by the Forest Service and is the foundation for the draft plan that is available for public review during a 90-day comment period. **Alternative 3** is a variation of Alternative 2 developed to address concerns about the impacts to human health and safety from prescribed burning on the national forest. The DEIS is broken down into 4 chapters: **Chapter 1** describes why we are updating management direction, **Chapter 2** describes the alternatives, **Chapter 3** describes environmental consequences of implementing each of the alternatives, and **Chapter 4** includes a list of preparers and mailing lists. A good way to become familiar with the alternatives is to compare how they address each issue and vary by allocations (management areas and maps) in Chapter 2.
- **DEIS Appendices** include additional detail on specific topics, including Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness Evaluations.

Common Terms and Labeling Used in the Draft Forest Plan

It will also be helpful if you become familiar with common terms used in the draft forest plan. The required forest plan direction is labeled to help readers locate information within the forest plan.

Desired condition (DC) is the vision for the future. It is a narrative description of the future conditions and changes expected to occur as the forest plan is implemented. Sometimes we may already be close to achieving the desired conditions, other times, it may take several years to achieve the desired conditions. Each desired condition is labeled with a "DC". Desired conditions are numbered and labeled according to the scale at which it is applied: Forestwide, or by Management Area (includes Ecosystems), or by Geographic Area (includes Special and Designated Areas).

- **Forestwide (F)** applies across the entire national forest ownership. An example of a forestwide desired condition: **DC-F-1(b). Longleaf Ecosystem Maintenance and Restoration.** *The historic fire return interval is restored where practical, using controlled prescribed fire. These prescribed fires are frequent (1 to 3 year fire return interval) and low intensity.*
- **Management Areas and Geographic Areas** are similar to "zones" in county plans with management direction specific to that "zone". This forest plan contains:
 - **Two management areas** - Management Area 1 (MA1) and Management Area 2 (MA2). The primary difference between the 2 management areas is our ability to safely apply landscape-level, low-intensity, frequent prescribed fire, which is critical to maintaining fire-adapted ecosystems. Embedded in each management area are the desired conditions for the different ecosystems found on the Francis

Marion. An **Ecosystem** is a land area that is covered by the same set of plants and animals. For example, think of an area that has mostly longleaf pine and all the other plants and animals that prefer to live in a longleaf pine forest, then consider the waterways and different types of dirt in that same area. It is the interactions of all these plants, animals, soil and water together that describes a particular ecosystem. We looked at 9 ecosystems in this forest plan. Some examples of those ecosystems are:

- **DC-MA1-5** - Oak forests and mesic hardwood forests;
 - **DC-MA1-7** - Broad forested swamps and floodplains;
 - **DC-MA1-8** - Maritime forest and salt marsh (see); and
 - **DC-MA1-9** - Rivers and streams.
- **Four Geographic Areas**, referred to as Resource Integration Zones (RIZ) in this draft plan), are Coastal, Wando, Wambaw and Santee. The RIZs are differentiated by how people use the area and how people benefit from national land in that particular RIZ. Desired conditions are labeled for each RIZ. An example of the label for the Coastal RIZ is **DC-Z-Coastal-0. Desired Conditions for the Coastal RIZ**. Embedded within each RIZ are the desired conditions for designated or special areas. **Designated areas** are lands designated by Congress or other authorities and include such areas as designated critical habitat for Frosted Flatwoods Salamander, national historic districts, wildernesses or wild and scenic rivers. **Special areas** are unique areas with its own specific desired conditions in the forest plan and include rare plant communities. An example of a desired condition for a designated area is: **DC-Z-Coastal-S-1. Historical Districts. Three Historical Districts aid in public understanding and appreciation of the interplay between human history and forest ecosystems: Sewee Historical District, Tibwin Historical District, and Walnut Grove Historical District.**

Objectives (OBJ) are stepping stones of achievement. They are a statement of a desired rate of progress toward achieving a desired condition. Each objective is labeled and applicable to a particular scale similar to the different scales for the desired conditions. For instance an objective for Management Area 2 is **OBJ-MA2 (b). Flow of Age Class. Establish approximately 5,000-6,000 acres of young age component (0-10) forest in loblolly pine or mixed pine-hardwood forests within Management Area 2 within 10 years of plan approval.**

Management Strategies describe how we will achieve the Objective. Not every objective has a management strategy. The objectives and management strategies describe how we will achieve our desired conditions.

Standards (S) and Guidelines (G) are limitations and restrictions on resource management practices. Standards are mandatory constraints. A guideline, on the other hand, is a constraint that allows for a departure, as long as the purpose of the guideline is met. Each guideline and standard is individually numbered. An example of a guideline is **G3. Avoid construction (roads, trails, recreational sites, etc.) in floodplains and wetlands.**

For More Information

If you have questions contact Mary Morrison at 803-561-4000 or Rhea Whalen at 843-336-3248. The decisions we make will guide management of the Francis Marion National Forest for the next decade and beyond. We look forward to your thoughtful review and input.