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**File Code:** 1920  
**Date:** September 12, 2016

Dear Interested Parties:

I am pleased to announce that the Rio Grande National Forest is initiating the formal scoping period for the Forest Plan revision process. The Forest completed the Assessment reports which identifies available information to be used in the revision process. We have also documented the Need for Change topics that will be addressed in revising the Plan. All of these documents, including the Notice of Intent and Proposed Action, can be found on the Forest website at [www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande](http://www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande). The existing Forest Plan approved in 1996 has been amended seven times and will remain in effect until the revised Forest Plan is approved. The Forest Plan will be revised under the 2012 Planning Rule and provide social, economic and ecological sustainability within Forest Service authority and the inherent capability of the plan area.

A Notice of Intent to prepare and Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register on September 12, 2016. A Legal Notice was published in the Valley Courier on September 13, which officially begins formal scoping for revising the Forest Plan. Scoping is an iterative process and input can be provided at any time, however to be most useful comments should be submitted within 45 days of the publication in the Valley Courier.

The attached table shows the Need for Change topics and where they can be found in the Initial Proposal (Need for Change, July 16, 2016) and appendices, the Notice of Intent and the Proposed Action documents. Not all topics have been addressed to date but we anticipate that the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Plan will address the remaining topics.

As I said above comments will be accepted throughout the entire plan revision process, but to be most useful to the process they should be submitted sooner rather than later. Also those wishing to establish standing to participate in the administrative review process may submit substantive formal comments within 45 days of the publication of the Legal Notice in the Valley Courier in accordance with 36 CFR 219 Subpart B.

Comments may be sent in one of the following ways:

- 1) via the Forest Plan Revision email address: [rgnf\\_forest\\_plan@fs.fed.us](mailto:rgnf_forest_plan@fs.fed.us);
- 2) to the Rio Grande National Forest's Supervisor's Office, Attn: Forest Plan Revision, 1803 W. Highway 160 Monte Vista, CO 81144; or
- 3) fax to 719-852-6250.

To provide more detailed information on the Proposed Action and associated documents, the Forest will be hosting informational meetings the last week of September. Meeting will be from 5:30 to 7:30 pm, at the following locations:

- Tuesday, September 27, Saguache Road and Bridge Building, 305 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Saguache



- Wednesday, September 28, South Fork Community Center, 28 Silver Thread Lane, South Fork
- Thursday, September 29, North Conejos School Board Meeting Room, 17890 Highway 285, La Jara

For more information, please contact Erin Minks, Forest Planner, [eminks@fs.fed.us](mailto:eminks@fs.fed.us), 719-852-6215 or Mike Blakeman, Public Affairs Officer, [mblakeman@fs.fed.us](mailto:mblakeman@fs.fed.us), 719-852-6212.

Information on plan revision is also available at the forest website [www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande](http://www.fs.usda.gov/riogrande). Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday.

Thank you again for your continued interest and participation in this critical planning process which will help build strategic, sustainable management direction for the next 10 to 15 years on the Rio Grande National Forest.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Dan S. Dallas*

DAN DALLAS  
Forest Supervisor

Comparison of Need for Change Topics and where they are found in the Initial Proposal, Notice of Intent and Proposed Action.

Initial Proposal (Need to Change) Topic	Need To Change	Notice of Intent	Proposed Action
<b>Re-evaluate the suitability of forest lands for multiple uses, including areas for timber production, communication sites, over the snow vehicle use, mechanized and or/motorized travel, and utility corridors.</b>	Page 2	Page 62707. "The forest also intends to re-evaluate the suitability of national forest lands to support other multiple uses, including over the snow vehicle use, communication sites, and utility corridors during analysis, following the development of alternatives to the proposed action with the public."	Timber Suitability discussion pp 16- 17.
<b>Conduct an inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommended wilderness on the Rio Grande National Forest</b>	Page 2 & Appendix A2	Page 62707. "The forest is still evaluating areas for wilderness character pursuant to Chapter 70 direction in the Forest Service Handbook 1909.12. The final decision will reflect the analysis of alternatives developed during scoping and a broad range of recommendations."	
<b>Conduct an inventory, evaluation, analysis, and recommend for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.</b>	Page 2 & Appendix A3	Page 62707. "The Proposed Action identifies 34 stream reaches to be taken into analysis for potential inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System first presented to the public in draft form in July 2016."	
<b>Update direction to further promote the recovery and conservation of federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species.</b>	Page 2	Page 62707. "Revised plan components are needed that focus on maintaining or restoring aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems to provide for species	

		diversity including threatened and endangered species, and species of conservation concern.”	
<b>Revise the 1996 Forest Plan to provide management direction to manage habitat to ensure viable populations of species of conservation concern.</b>	Page 2 & Appendix A5	Page 62707: To ensure for management accountability, however, the forest will develop additional required plan components, including standards, guidelines, and suitability determinations during the scoping process and analysis to reflect this adaptive management strategy while ensuring for ecosystem integrity, sustainability, habitat connectivity and the viability of species of conservation concern.	
<b>Revise the 1996 plan to incorporate management direction related to renewable energy.</b>	Page 3 & Appendix A6		
<b>Revise management direction related to climate change.</b>	Page 3	Page 62707. “To meet the Planning Rule’s requirement to provide for ecological sustainability, management direction is also needed that addresses ecosystem integrity and diversity, including key ecosystem characteristics, in light of change in climate, land ownership and recreational use patterns, as well as other threats and stressors to those ecosystems.”	Page 8, under Goal 2.
<b>Consider goals and objectives of the Forest Service strategic plan.</b>	Page 3		
<b>Develop sustainable management direction for current and future recreation uses.</b>	Page 3		

<b>Forest plans must identify priority watersheds for maintenance and restoration. The Forest Service National Watershed Condition Framework must be used in plan revisions.</b>	Page 3 & Appendix A10	Page 62707. "The Proposed Action identifies watersheds that are a priority for maintenance and restoration."	
<b>Revise the accessibility of the previous plan to the public, including incorporating current and changing technology and web-based tools to facilitate the diverse needs of the public</b>	Page 4 & Rio Grande National Forest web site	Page 62707. "This framework provides a vehicle for the future plan to better communicate how the agency manages the forest, a common theme heard throughout the public process."	
<b>Re-evaluate the number, arrangement, and boundaries of Management Areas, and plan direction in the current forest plan management areas to minimize complexity and promote ecosystem integrity and connectivity</b>	Page 4 & Appendix B2		Pp 13-33
<b>Revise the current plan to allow for more adaptive management to better meet and monitor desired conditions related to:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• potential climate change effects</li> <li>• fluctuations in forest budgets, • using partnerships, volunteers, and citizen scientists</li> </ul>	Page 4 & Appendix B4	Page 62707. "This framework is designed to increase the responsiveness of forest managers to changing conditions on the landscape, changes in higher level direction, and new technologies that are not yet foreseen."	Page 36
<b>Revise the current plan to include management approaches that consider local economies, markets, and partnership opportunities as tools for meeting desired conditions.</b>	Page 5		Page 8, Goal 3
<b>Revise the current forest plan to allow for better integration, clearer direction, and more flexibility with regard to the use of prescribed and naturally occurring fire as a management tool and disturbance agent within the constraints of human health and safety</b>	Page 6		Pp 15-16
<b>Update the existing forest-wide air monitoring plan and 1994 Wilderness</b>	Page 6		

<b>Air Quality Monitoring Plan reflecting current best management practices</b>		
<b>Update the previous plan to incorporate the negotiated settlement language and decree between the Rio Grande National Forest and the State of Colorado (2000)</b>	Page 6	
<b>Revise the previous plan to provide management direction for the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, including language from the Old Spanish National Historic Trail Comprehensive Management Plan when completed by the National Park Service; for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDT), including language from the 2009 CDT Comprehensive Plan; for the Sangre de Cristo National Heritage Area, Cumbres and Toltec National Historic Landmark; and for the Rio Grande del Norte National Monument.</b>	Page 6	Pp 21-22
<b>Evaluate additional areas for special designation, including areas with cultural values, ecosystem types known to be heavily fragmented, and areas important for the protection of plant communities and special habitats vulnerable to climate change. Evaluate additional protection of two critically significant areas, Mt. Blanca Massif and the Natural Arch, while maintaining motorized access.</b>	Page 7	Pp 21-22
<b>Revisit the size of the Fremont Special Interest Area</b>	Page 7	Pp 17 & 21-22
<b>Update management direction to maintain separation between bighorn and domestic sheep. Address the need for management direction regarding recreational pack goats</b>	Page 7	

Need To Change Document (September 2016) published on Rio Grande National Forest website, September 12, 2016.

Notice of Intent published in Federal Register. Vol. 81, No. 176. Monday, September 12, 2016. Pages 62706-62708.

Proposed Action available on Rio Grande National Forest website, September 12, 2016.