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Department of
Agriculture

Forest Service

Rio Grande
National Forest

September 2016



The Rio Grande National Forest Plan: Proposed Action

In developing a proposed revised plan, the responsible official *"shall engage the public... early and throughout the planning process."*
(36 CFR 219.4 (a)).



RIO GRANDE PYRAMID IN THE WEMINUCHE WILDERNESS.

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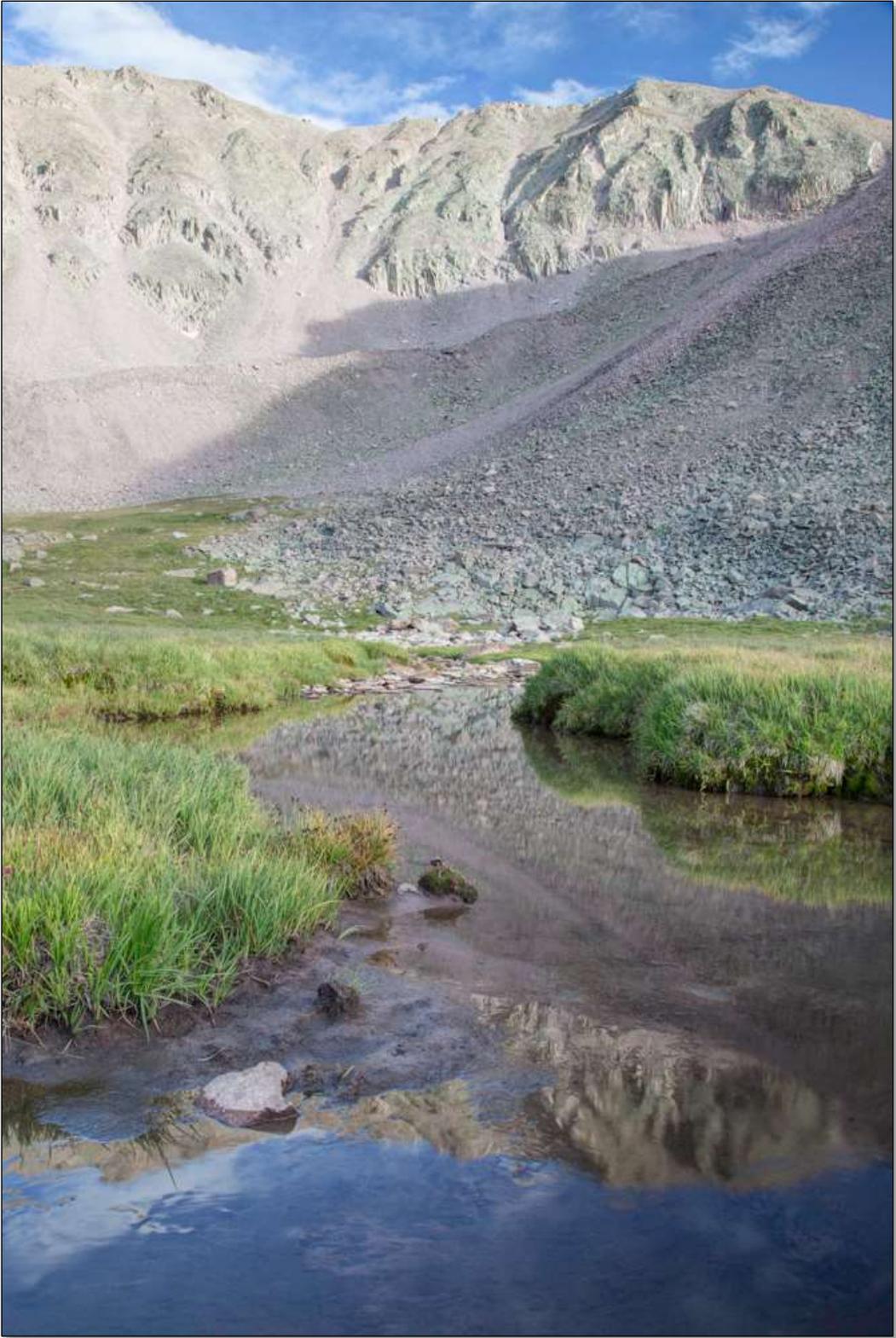
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Rio Grande National Forest Proposed Action

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Abstract: The Forest Service has identified the preliminary purpose and need and proposed action to revise the 1996 Rio Grande National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan in accordance with the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule adopted by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Assessments documenting existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability and their relationship to the land management plan within the context of the broader landscape were published during the spring of 2016. Relevant information from the assessments, applicable laws and policies, and public comment were considered in determining the need to change and proposed action.



UPPER EAST WILLOW CREEK, PART OF THE WASON PARK CRA.

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WATERFALL BELOW LAKE ANN, SOUTH SAN JUAN WILDERNESS.

Introduction

This document lays out the strategy that the Rio Grande National Forest (Fig. 1) will use to proceed into the formal Forest Plan Revision process, which will result in an Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision as well as a revised Forest Plan. The strategic framework presented below is organized by levels starting with overarching goals. The goals help focus the strategic, tactical, adaptive management, and monitoring domains that provide a strategic vision for how to make the revised Forest Plan more adaptive and responsive to monitoring results, changing direction, changing technologies, and changing resource conditions.

Included in the strategic framework are Geographic Areas and Management Areas. Desired conditions are described for each Management Area while Geographic Area descriptions present more of a management emphasis based on land status and line officer discretion. Existing standards and guidelines will be considered during the analysis and further plan development; however, those are not yet finalized. All aspects of forest plan revision will incorporate the best available science.

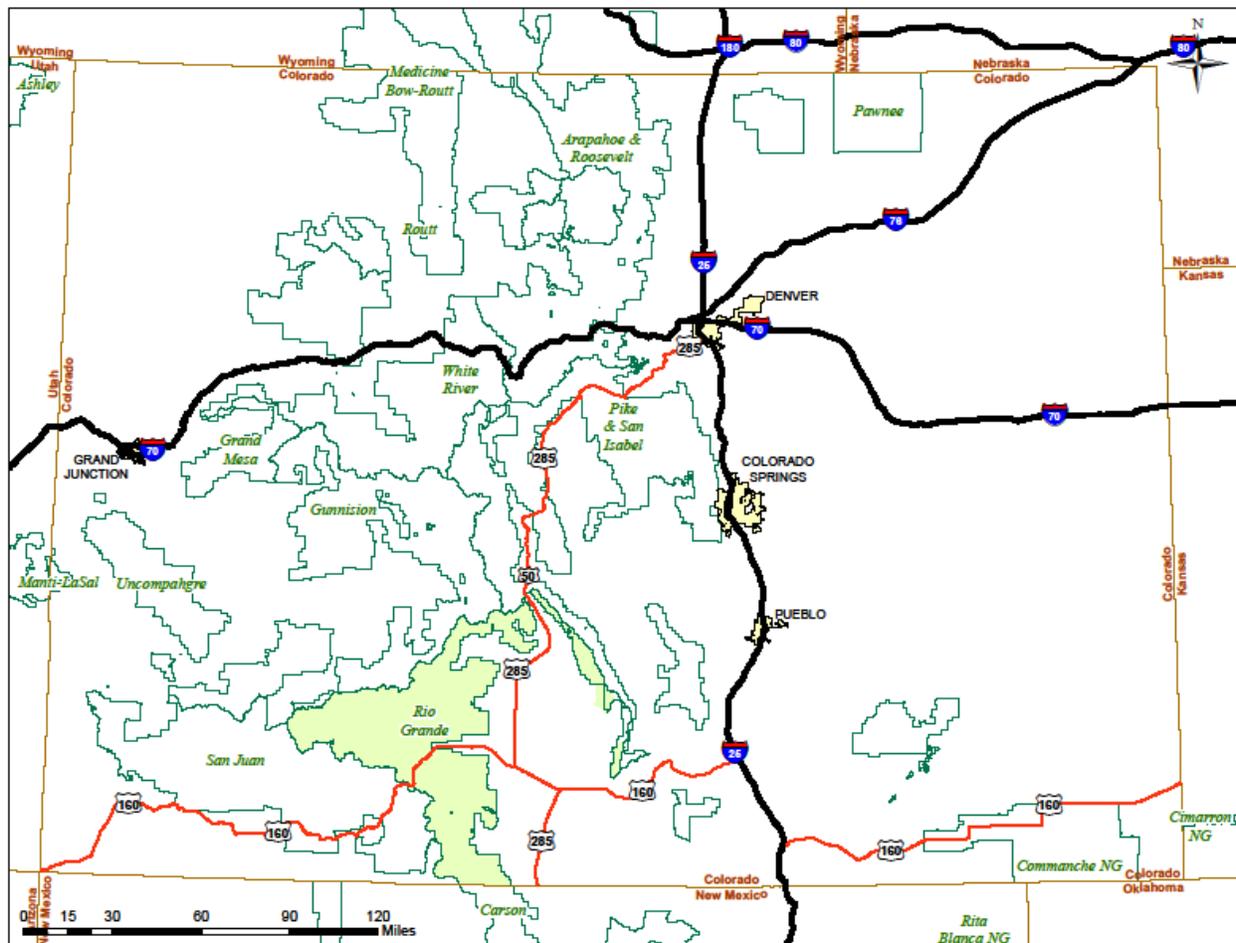


Figure 1. Location of Rio Grande National Forest in Colorado.

Strategic Framework

The strategic framework (Fig. 2) uses the 1996 Forest Plan as a starting point. Some changes are needed to incorporate amendments and subsequent direction into the revised Forest Plan. Implementation and monitoring have shown that the overall management direction of the Forest Plan is sound but since its approval in 1996, significant changes in economic, social, and ecological conditions have occurred that need to be addressed. The revised Forest Plan could include Forest-wide Goal statements and newly established Geographic Areas and Forest-wide Fire Management Zones. Management Areas from the 1996 Forest Plan will be adjusted to reflect a reduction in the number of Management Areas, three proposed new Management Areas, and changes to the boundaries of some exiting Management Areas. Two of the newly proposed Management Areas incorporate direction from the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule, while the other one reduces three separate Wilderness Management Areas into one.

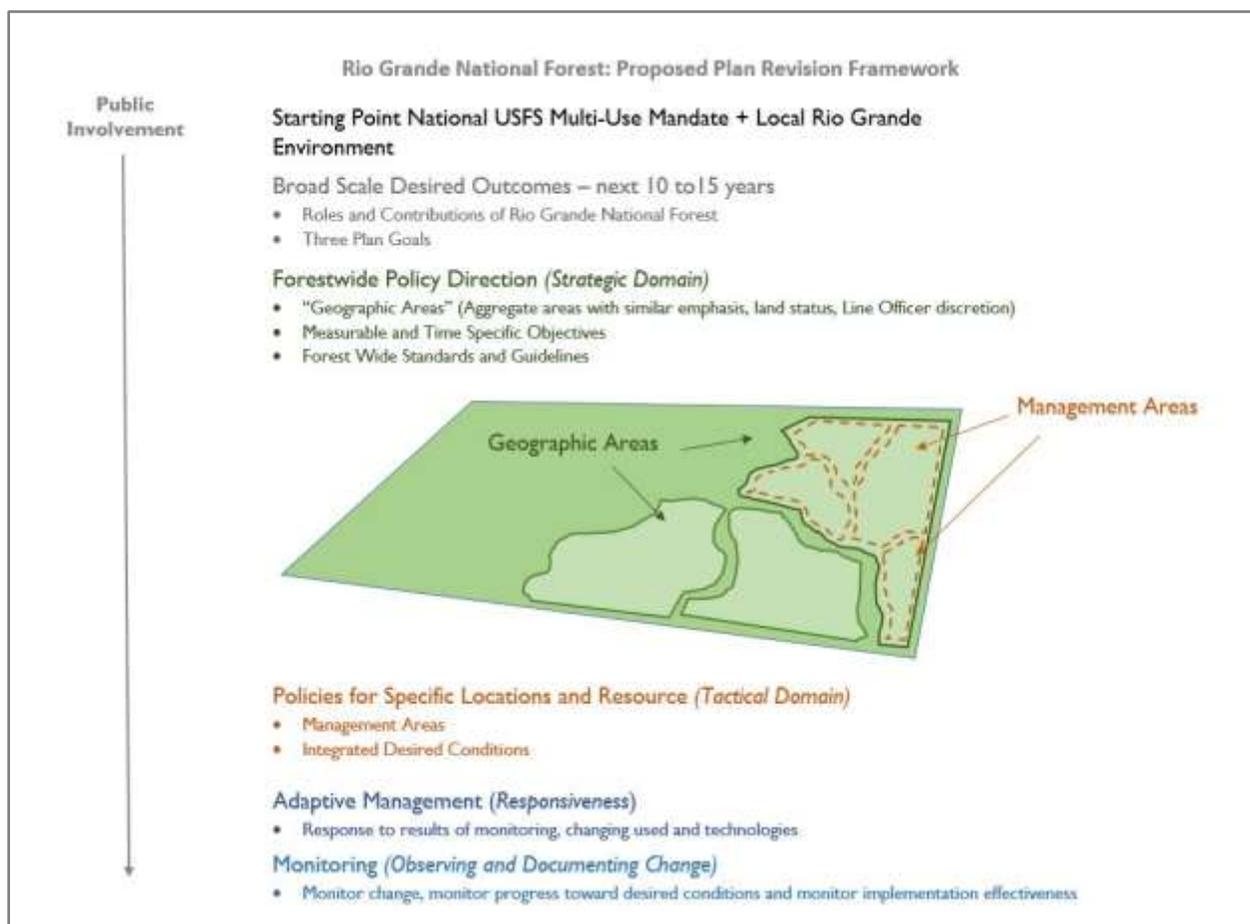


Figure 2. Forest Plan Revision Framework.

The Forest Plan will bring the national mandate for multiple use into the current environment on the Rio Grande National Forest and southern Colorado. To incorporate the many uses on the Forest while maintaining the resources, the Forest Service has established three goals that state the intent of the Plan direction. The Goals address watersheds and watershed health, sustainable ecosystems, and the social and economic contributions of the Forest to surrounding communities, in addition to connecting citizens to their public lands.

The remainder of the Plan is divided into strategic, tactical, adaptive management, and monitoring domains that are interwoven and feed information back to help land managers determine how to adapt Plan direction to continue to move resources toward desired conditions, and how best to incorporate those changes into Forest Plan direction.

The Strategic domain encompasses the Forest-wide policy direction that includes an overall emphasis for Geographic Areas, which are areas with similar management emphasis and land status designations. Forest-wide desired conditions describe the conditions Forest managers are working to achieve while objectives set measures and time frames to help managers determine if resources are trending toward desired conditions. Standards and guidelines may be associated with these areas to establish sideboards to direct activities in these Geographic Areas. Standards and guidelines, both Forest-wide and Management Area specific, will be included in the final Plan but have not yet been finalized.

The Tactical domain divides the Geographic Areas into smaller Management Areas that have specific Integrated Desired Conditions representing most resources. Management Areas show lands with compatible resource direction and fit within the larger Geographic Areas. Management Areas incorporate resource-specific management direction that regulates activities allowed within each specific Management Area. Management Areas are designated by numbers, with the first integer representing the overall emphasis of the area (Table 1.1).

The Adaptive Management domain proposes to create a process designed to increase the responsiveness of current and future forest managers to changing conditions on the landscape, changes in higher level directions, and developing technologies. The process was developed in response to comments from the public to all the Forest Plan to adapt to changing conditions in a more timely way in the future.

Table 1.1. Management Area Designations

Management Area Integer	Emphasis
1	Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designation
2	Areas set aside for research
3	Preservation of Roadless characteristics
4	Areas designated for scenic values or high recreation emphasis
5	General forest management and wildlife designations
6	Grassland management
7 ¹	Wildland Urban Interface
8	Ski-based recreation

¹ The 1996 Forest Plan did not identify any area in Management Area 7.

The Monitoring domain reflects the eight topic areas required by the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.12) and reflects an ongoing partnership with the Forest Inventory and Analysis program that is managed by the Forest Service State and Private Forestry organization to share information collected on the Forest. Monitoring questions and measurable indicators will be developed and refined during the analysis process.

Forest-wide Vision

Roles & Contributions

The Rio Grande National Forest consists of about 1,830,000 acres in south-central Colorado. The Forest forms the backdrop for the San Luis Valley, one of the largest mountain basins in the world. The headwaters of the Rio Grande originate in the Forest, and most Forest watersheds feed into the Rio Grande system. Water for municipal, industrial, and agricultural purposes comes from the Sangre de Cristo mountain range on the Valley's east side, and the San Juan mountain range to the west.

Elevation in the Forest ranges from about 7,800 feet in the foothills to more than 13,000 feet in the San Juan range along the Continental Divide. The Sangre de Cristo range, to the east, has several peaks that exceed 14,000 feet.

The expansive and flat San Luis Valley, which contains very little National Forest System land, is composed of unconsolidated sediments laid down in the late Tertiary period. The Sangre de Cristo and San Juan mountain ranges on either side of the San Luis Valley, where most of the Forest is, are of different origin and geologic age. The San Juan Mountains are composed of volcanic rocks and related shallow, intrusive rocks of the mid-to-late Tertiary period. Although the Sangre de Cristo Mountains are of more recent origin, the bedrock is older. The steep, narrow Sangre de Cristo Mountains were formed by faulting and thrusting along the Rio Grande rift.

Forest ecosystems generally vary by elevation, with the highest elevation being the alpine tundra that occurs at or above 11,500 feet in elevation. Decreasing in elevation is the spruce-fir forest, which is generally inhabited by Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*) and subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*) mixed with quaking aspen (*Populus tremuloides*). Vegetation in these ecosystems has been significantly impacted by the recent spruce bark beetle infestation.

The mixed conifer-wet ecosystem occurs in the transition zone between the higher elevation spruce-fir and the drier mixed conifer type. It is generally dominated by Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) and various combinations of white fir (*Abies Concolor*), Colorado blue spruce (*Picea pungens*), Engelmann spruce, or subalpine fir with incidental occurrences of ponderosa pine (*Pinus ponderosa*).

The drier mixed conifer ecosystem sites include a mix of conifer species, including ponderosa pine, Douglas fir, white fir, Colorado blue spruce, and smaller amounts of aspen. Depending on site conditions, limber pine (*Pinus flexilis*), bristlecone pine (*Pinus aristata*), and some pinyon pine (*Pinus edulis*) or juniper (*Juniperus* spp.) can be present.

The Rocky Mountain alpine turf ecosystem is widespread above the upper timberline (11,000 and higher). Dominant species include boreal sagebrush (*Artemisia arctica*), several *Carex* species, tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*), *Festuca* species, Ross' avens (*Geum rossii*),

Bellardi bog sedge (*Kobresia myosuroides*), cushion phlox (*Phlox pulvinata*), and alpine clover (*Trifolium dasyphyllum*).

Closer to the Valley the pinyon-juniper woodland ecosystem includes pinyon pine, Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*), and Utah juniper (*Juniperus osteosperma*). These woodlands generally occur on warm, dry sites on mountain slopes, mesas, plateaus, and ridges. Understory species include sparse perennial grasses, annual and perennial forbs, and sparse shrubs.

Rocky Mountain Gambel oak shrubland ecosystems are found at the north end of the San Luis Valley near Poncha Pass. Dominant species include Gambel oak (*Quercus gambelii*), serviceberry (*Amelanchier* spp.), sagebrush (*Artemisia* spp.), and various other shrubs, grasses, and forbs.

The Southern Rocky Mountain montane-subalpine grassland ecosystem includes Thurber fescue (*Festuca thurberi*), Arizona fescue (*Festuca arizonica*), and several other grasses, forbs, and sedges.

The Rocky Mountain riparian ecosystem includes numerous riparian types in the upper montane/subalpine zones. These systems are highly variable and generally consist of cottonwoods, willows, sedges, and other herbaceous vegetation, aspen, and conifers such as blue spruce, Engelmann spruce, and subalpine fir.

The Rio Grande National Forest has habitat for an estimated 300 species of mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians, and fish. Eight of the 300 species are federally recognized as threatened or endangered animal species and include:

- Black-footed ferret (*Mustela nigripes*)
- Canada lynx (*Lynx canadensis*)
- Gunnison sage grouse (*Centrocercus minimus*)
- Mexican spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis lucida*)
- New Mexico meadow jumping mouse (*Zapus hudsonius luteus*)
- Southwest willow flycatcher (*Empidonax traillii extimus*)
- Uncompahgre fritillary butterfly (*Boloria acrocneema*)
- Yellow-billed cuckoo (*Coccyzus americanus*).

The Rio Grande National Forest represents a large part of the core area for lynx, which were reintroduced to Colorado from 1999 to 2006. The vast majority of lynx in Colorado remain and reproduce in the high-elevation spruce-fir zone in the southwestern part of the state, including the Rio Grande.

Counties containing National Forest System lands include Archuleta, Alamosa, Conejos, Hinsdale, Mineral, Rio Grande, Saguache, and San Juan. Many counties are characterized by low population densities, high unemployment, and low per capita income. Although there are no Forest lands in Custer and Costilla counties, people there rely on the Forest for gathering forest products such as firewood, and for hiking, camping, and other recreational activities.

The area of influence for the Rio Grande goes beyond the eight counties that make up the Forest. Colorado communities within Alamosa, Archuleta, Chafee, Conejos, Costilla, Fremont, Gunnison, Hinsdale, Huerfano, La Plata, Mineral, Montrose, Park, Rio Grande, Saguache, and San Juan counties and New Mexico communities in Rio Arriba and Taos counties are recognized as having strong socio-economic ties to the Forest.

Communities surrounding the Rio Grande have become increasingly attractive to new residents because of their proximity to open spaces and natural settings, and easy access to year-round recreational opportunities. Population projections indicate that the San Luis Valley and the region surrounding the Rio Grande Forest will continue to grow, increasing demands on forest resources.

Rio Grande National Forest offers diverse recreation opportunities that include backpacking, boating, camping (both developed and dispersed), cross-country skiing, fishing, hiking, hunting, off-road vehicle riding, picnicking, rock climbing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling.

There are more than 1,350 miles of trails on the Forest including the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, Colorado Trail, and Old Spanish National Historic Trail. About 170 miles of the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail lie within the Rio Grande, starting at the forest boundary with Gunnison National Forest and stretching to the New Mexico state line. Sections of the Old Spanish National Historic Trail, designated in 2002, pass through the Forest, offering a glimpse into past trade routes that moved supplies and slaves from Santa Fe to the California territory in the 1820s.



FISHING AT LOVE LAKE.



RIO GRANDE RESERVOIR.

Nationwide, Colorado contains the sixth highest acreage of National Forest System lands. About 14.5 million acres of national forest and grasslands provide recreation opportunities for residents and visitors in Colorado. Tourism is a main source of income for Colorado and most of the Rocky Mountains. Beautiful scenery and local economic benefits are tied together closely.

Rio Grande National Forest makes up 13 percent of the National Forest System land in the state. The Forest has two designated scenic byways—the Silver Thread and Los Caminos Antiguos—and a well-developed system of roads and trails.

Many outfitter and guide services provide visitor opportunities to experience the Forest.

Located in the south-central portion of the Rocky Mountain range, the Forest offers unique scenic experiences. The Forest combines southwestern flora with the spectacular scenery of the central Rocky Mountains. To the east, the open floor of the San Luis Valley is surrounded by the

rugged mountain peaks of the Sangre de Cristo range. To the north, high mountain peaks give way to much gentler rolling hills covered in lodgepole pine that extend to the Valley bottom. Looking west, the scattered mountain peaks are mixed with rolling hills of mixed rock canyons and open meadows. To the south, the Valley is fairly flat, with several dominant, rounded mountains that rise above the horizon.

These characteristics offer visitors some of Colorado's most beautiful scenery. The Sangre de Cristo range is home to several of Colorado's 14,000-foot peaks including Crestone Peak, Crestone Needles, Kit Carson, and Blanca Peak. Great Sand Dune National Park and Preserve borders Rio Grande National Forest in the Sangre de Cristo range. Some of the tallest dunes in North America are found in the Park, which is operated by the National Park Service.

The western part of the Forest has a view of the Rio Grande Pyramid, the 100-foot high North Clear Creek Falls, Bristol Head Mountain, the headwaters of the Rio Grande River, and the La Garita, South San Juan, and Weminuche Wilderness areas. Parks and open meadows, such as Saguache Park, contain a variety of plant and animal life and are home to a wide range of wildflowers.

Historic scenic areas include the Bachelor Loop, near Creede; the Bonanza Loop, near Villa Grove; and the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad, near Antonito. Tucked in the foothills are many unique rock formations, including the Natural Arch and Summer Coon Volcano areas. Adjacent Bureau of Land Management lands have well known canyons such as Penitente, Witches, Sidewinder, and the Rock Garden canyons that draw avid rock climbers to the area.



NATURAL ARCH – POSSIBLE PROPOSED SPECIAL DESIGNATED AREA.

Forest-wide Goals

Forest-wide Goals provide umbrella statements that all other direction would tier to. The goal statements are numbered to allow for reference; the numbers do not indicate any priority.

Goal 1: Protect and restore watershed health, water resources, and the systems that rely on them

National forests that exist today were initially created under the guidance of the National Forest Reserve Act of 1891. The Act allowed the President of the United States to set aside forest reserves from the land in the public domain. This Act provided for wise use of the lands that would provide protection of timber at the headwaters of streams, reduce downstream flooding, and provide a summer-long water supply for irrigation in the arid West¹. Protecting and restoring watershed health reaffirms the Act that created today's national forests.

Opportunities exist to emphasize collaborative stewardship of watersheds and the interrelated biological, economic, and social factors that affect these areas. Healthy and functioning watersheds contribute to overall resource health.

¹ Early Administration of the Forest Reserve Act: Interior Department and General Land Office Policies, 1891-1897, James Muhn, http://www.foresthistory.org/Publications/Books/Origins_National_Forests/sec17.htm

Goal 2: Maintain and restore sustainable, resilient ecosystems

Ecosystems are a barometer of the quality of land management practices. A natural variety of species, genetic composition, and ecological processes are key to providing the diversity needed for resiliency in the face of environmental disturbances and changes.

Aggressively diversifying age classes and structure, seral stage, and habitat classes, where appropriate, in the next planning horizon would provide many benefits including but not limited to providing resilience to insect and disease outbreaks, responsiveness to anticipated changes in climate, ecosystem services, recreation, increased social and economic benefits, and more.

Goal 3: Actively contribute to social and economic sustainability in the broader landscape and connect citizens to the land

Rio Grande National Forest contributes forest products and tourism opportunities that are important to local economies, and provide ecosystem services for current and future generations.

Places with human influence are maintained while protecting religious, tribal, or culturally significant areas.

Opportunities are available for individuals, partners, and organizations to be active participants in managing, monitoring, and implementing projects that achieve integrated resource management.

The Rio Grande provides natural-appearing landscapes with diverse scenery. The Forest Service maintains and provides access to a multitude of recreation opportunities within the expected capacity of the Rio Grande National Forest budget. Designated areas, such as wilderness and wild, scenic, and recreational rivers, are maintained to protect their integrity and avoid damage incurred by overuse of these precious resources. The Forest provides a wide range of outdoor experiences, ranging from primitive to highly developed, that are within the overall capacity of the Forest. Where possible, interpretive opportunities increase public knowledge, provide historical background, and promote a connection of the current people to the past and their land.

Heritage resource sites are managed and integrated with recreation and environmental education in compliance with all applicable laws and regulations. When appropriate, sites are nominated to the National Register of Historic Places and managed to those standards.

Colorado tourism thrives on outdoor recreation and beautiful scenery, and the Forest maintains these values to continue to attract visitors to the area. Market-oriented programs such as minerals, range management, special use permitting, and timber management are managed to continue. Non-marketable programs, including fisheries, heritage resources, recreation, water, Wilderness, and wildlife, are managed to continue to supply goods and services as requested by the public.

Ecosystem services, as defined in the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 291), include provisioning services such as air, water, energy, fiber, and minerals; regulating services such as soil stabilization; and cultural services that include cultural heritage values and recreational experiences. The Rio Grande strives to meet the demand for these services.

Strategic Domain

Forest-wide Desired Conditions

The desired conditions for resource areas contained in the 1996 Forest Plan are listed below. Desired conditions provide a description of the mosaic of land and resource conditions that are managed at both the Forest and Management Area level.

Desired Conditions for Ecological Resources	
Biological Diversity	<p>Habitat composition (including seral stage), structure, pattern (connectivity), and disturbance frequencies similar to those that result from natural disturbances (insects, disease, and fire) are maintained to the extent possible, given legal and policy limitations, and the desired condition for the area.</p> <hr/> <p>Provide ecological conditions necessary to contribute to the recovery of Federally listed species, conservation of proposed and candidate species, and maintain viable populations of species of conservation concern in the plan area.</p> <hr/> <p>Habitats for federally listed Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed species and Species of Conservation Concern are protected, restored, and enhanced. Habitat on National Forest System lands is managed to help assure that those species whose viability is a concern survive throughout their range, and that habitat conditions improve or stabilize.</p>
Air Resources	<p>Air quality remains excellent and exceeds state and federal standards. Visibility is among the best in the country. Forest activities do not affect long-term conditions or contribute to off-Forest concerns.</p>
Timber Resources	<p>The vegetative structure on the Rio Grande National Forest is capable of sustaining timber harvest that supplies wood products while providing for the biological diversity of those forested areas.</p> <hr/> <p>Some harvest operations are designed to mimic natural disturbance events or processes.</p>
Range	<p>Vegetation is managed for a mixture of seral stages, with most of the rangelands in mid to high seral stages. Site-specific desired conditions are fully described in the allotment management plan.</p>
Fire	<p>The role of fire in ecosystem dynamics is recognized and sponsored when and where it does not threaten human life and property.</p> <hr/> <p>The amount, arrangement, and continuity of live and dead materials that contribute to fire spread (fuel profiles) are consistent with land uses and estimates of historic fire regimes.</p>
Noxious Weeds	<p>Noxious weeds are managed using an integrated pest management approach. All control methods, such as physical removal, prescribed fire, mechanical devices, biological treatments, or chemical applications, are evaluated to reduce potential adverse effects on human health and the environment, and are designed to meet Management Objectives.</p>
Water and Aquatic Resources	<p>Healthy watersheds operate in a dynamic equilibrium between extreme natural events. Surface-disturbing activities are managed so that floods, droughts, sediment loads, bank erosion, rills, gullies, and landslides are not markedly increased.</p>

Desired Conditions for Ecological Resources	
	<p>Water quality is maintained or improved, with all stream segments having a near-reference-stream appearance. Water is suitable for municipal water supplies after normal treatment, including supplies obtained from shallow alluvial aquifers. Chemical, physical, and biological attributes are improved and maintained in a healthy condition, ensuring future use.</p>
	<p>Stream health is maintained through natural processes without artificial controls. Streams have the expected range of habitat features (for example, healthy riparian vegetation, stable banks, overwintering pools, and healthy aquatic organisms).</p>
	<p>Riparian areas and floodplains are healthy, fully functioning ecosystems. Vegetation is diverse and is generally in a later-seral condition, to provide site stability.</p>
	<p>Fish thrive in Forest lakes and streams in response to adequate habitat and water quality. Natural fish habitat is preferred and promoted over human-made habitat.</p>
Soils	<p>Soils are maintained in, or improved to, healthy conditions to allow the ecosystems they support to flourish. Healthy soils and ecosystem sustainability will be assured if soil damages, such as erosion, displacement, compaction, scorching, and nutrient drains, are kept within allowable limits.</p>
	<p>Ecosystem management activities are harmonious with soil capabilities, potentials, and limitations.</p>
	<p>Soils may be periodically disturbed by management activities, but are restored and reclaimed to original potentials after activities have been completed.</p>
	<p>Where fire is used to perpetuate an ecosystem, it is managed to accomplish resource objectives without unnecessarily risking or jeopardizing the ability of the site to sustain ecosystems.</p>
	<p>Healthy soils provide certain products such as wood, forage for livestock and wildlife, water, recreation, minerals, and aesthetic benefits. To maintain these benefits for the long term, soil health needs to remain within acceptable limits.</p>
Minerals	<p>Mineral development is compatible with ecosystem capabilities and resource values. Balanced use and development of mineral resources are allowed, while protecting other resource values with stipulations, mitigation, and careful monitoring. Problems caused by historic mining are corrected.</p>
Special Forest Products	<p>Special forest products, such as firewood, building rock, herb and vegetable products, medicinal and pharmaceutical products, wild edible mushrooms, wild berries and fruit, landscaping products, craft products, and floral and greenery products, continue to be available from the Forest. Plants include trees, shrubs, water plants, forbs, grasses, mosses, lichens, and fungi. Plant parts that are used include leaves, boughs, bark, bulbs, corms, seeds, nuts, and fruits.</p>
	<p>The gathering of forest products depends on the sustainable limits of the resource. In addition, permits may be required for some of these products.</p>
	<p>The Forest Service recognizes the needs of people from the San Luis Valley and surrounding areas, and strives to meet their needs for forest and wood products while protecting those resources for future generations.</p>

Desired Conditions for Social Resources	
Research Natural Areas	Several Research Natural Areas (RNAs) represent a variety of ecosystems in the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan Mountains. Ecosystems represented are typical plant associations that occur on the Forest, from the lowest elevations up through the alpine zone.
Unroaded Areas	Selected unroaded areas are maintained to offer nonmotorized, or limited motorized, recreation opportunities outside Wilderness. Ecological composition, structure, pattern, and natural processes (fire, insects, disease, floods, etc.) are maintained, where feasible, to perpetuate biological diversity.
Wild and Scenic Rivers	The “outstandingly remarkable” resources and values of selected rivers and their adjacent corridors are managed to protect their existing conditions for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.
Wilderness	Designated wilderness is managed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retain its pristine character and natural processes with minimal evidence of human influence, • offer opportunities for solitude, and • retain its ecological, educational, scenic, and historical values.
Special Interest Areas	Special Interest Areas are managed to protect or enhance their unique botanical, archeological, geologic, or other values. Some areas offer interpretive sites and educational opportunities.
Heritage Resources	Heritage resources supply information about the nation's heritage, offer quality recreation opportunities for the public, and contribute information that aids management of other Forest resources. Proactive consultation with Tribes helps ensure the protection, preservation, and use of areas that are culturally important to them. Heritage resources are systematically evaluated and nominated for the National Register of Historic Places when they meet eligibility criteria. Heritage resources are protected from damage by project activities or vandalism through project design, specified protection measures, monitoring, and coordination.
Recreation	The Forest Recreation program is managed to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation within appropriate settings, • be responsive to visitor desires and increase service to the public, • maintain a broad range of quality developed recreation facilities within capacity, • feature traditional and nontraditional dispersed recreation opportunities, • showcase scenic byways and landscapes, • expand interpretive services, and • allow for current areas used as summer homes, resorts, and youth camps to continue to be managed as recreation special-use development areas.
Scenery	The outstanding scenery of the Rio Grande National Forest is a major attraction for visitors. Management is focused on maintaining this high scenic quality, especially of areas seen from road and trail corridors, developed recreation sites, administrative sites, and towns and cities near the Forest.

Desired Conditions for Social Resources	
	Encourage vegetative diversity and feature scenic attractions.
	Areas exceeding unacceptably low Scenic Integrity Levels are rehabilitated to a higher Scenic Integrity Objective.
Desired Administrative Conditions	
General Infrastructure	Reservoirs and Ponds: All dams on National Forest System lands are inspected to ensure public safety and comply with all appropriate laws and regulations. High- and moderate-hazard dams have current Emergency Preparedness Plans in place.
	Facilities: Safe, accessible, functionally efficient, aesthetically pleasing, energy-efficient, and cost-effective buildings and related facilities (owned, operated, occupied, or authorized by the Forest Service) needed to achieve resource management objectives are maintained or constructed.
	Drinking Water: The Forest Service will test water at facilities under special-use permit to ensure that human health is protected in accordance with the Safe Drinking Water Act.
	Waste Water: Discharge or infiltration of pollutants from all wastewater disposal facilities owned and operated by the Forest Service, or that are under special-use permit from the Forest Service, do not create health hazards or nuisance conditions. This discharge does not alter the quality or characteristics of ground water and surface water beyond applicable federal or state water-quality and effluent-discharge standards.
	Roads: The road system continues to serve as adequate access for the public to enjoy the Forest. Road construction is limited, and the amount of reconstruction has decreased. Road closure is emphasized in some areas to enhance wildlife habitat, soil, and water resources.
Real Estate	Develop a land ownership pattern that improves the ability of the Forest Service to meet Forest needs and public objectives.
	Land adjustments through purchases, exchanges, and donations include an array of unique plant and animal habitats, riparian areas, geologic features, heritage resources, and recreation opportunities.
Health and Safety	Rio Grande National Forest is responsive to public needs in emergencies, and supports and enters into cooperative agreements with local officials.
	Forest work programs are conducted within the guidelines of the National Health and Safety Codes and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
Rural Development	Recognizing the economic dependency of rural communities on National Forest System lands and resources, Forest managers cooperate with local rural communities to develop sustainable enterprises that contribute to the general economic and social vitality of the area. Forest managers also give sufficient advance notice to rural communities about potential changes that may affect local economies.
	Forest managers cooperate with local, county, state, and tribal partners to meet rural community needs.

Objectives

Objectives listed here are not meant to be an exhaustive list, but present a starting point for beginning a larger conversation. It is expected that objectives will be changed and added throughout the analysis process. Other required plan components will be developed during the analysis process.

Objectives are a required plan component under the 2012 Planning Rule. They should be measurable and time specific and will be used to measure progress toward goals and desired conditions. The 1996 Forest Plan contained objectives that will be evaluated and adjusted to meet the measurable and time-specific aspect of the direction. Examples of potential Objectives are:

- OBJ GF1: Within 10 years of plan approval, take action to eliminate non-native invasive species on 300 acres.
- OBJ GF2: Take action to maintain, enhance, or improve conditions on three to five fen habitats within 10 years of plan approval.
- OBJ GF3: Take action to maintain, enhance, or improve condition on three to five meadows within 10 years of plan approval.
- OBJ GF4: Take action to maintain or restore structure, composition, or function of habitat for fisheries and other aquatic species along 3 to 5 miles of stream over a 10-year period.
- OBJ GF5: Use appropriate and authorized tools including grazing, mechanical treatment, prescribed fire, or naturally occurring fire to meet resource objectives and reduce vegetation build-up to lower the risk to communities and other values.
- OBJ GF6: Improve condition class on at least one identified priority watershed, as defined by the national Watershed Condition Framework, within 10 years of plan approval.

Geographic Areas

Forest management provides for a mix of environments across the landscape. Much like city zoning, the forest is divided into areas that have similar management emphasis.

In response to comments received during the Assessment phase of the Plan Revision process, the Proposed Action clarifies direction based on land status and reduces overlapping direction. The proposed format maintains much of the previous direction but add place-based desired conditions to better focus overall direction. The Proposed Action incorporates Geographic Areas that combine Management Areas with similar emphases into larger groupings based on land status and line officer discretion. Four Geographic Areas are proposed: General Forest, Primitive Wilderness, Roadless, and Specially Designated. Management Areas designated under the 1996 Forest Plan, with some modifications, would fit into the larger Geographic Area boundaries. How Management Areas from the 1996 Forest Plan integrate into the Geographic Areas is shown in Table 1.2, along with the proposed changes to Management Areas.

Table 1.2. Proposed Geographic Areas that contain 1996 Forest Plan Management Areas in relation to proposed Management Areas

Geographic Area	1996 Forest Plan Management Area	Proposed Management Area
General Forest	4.3	4.3
	5.11	5.11
	5.13	5.13
	5.41	5.41
	5.42	5.42
	6.6	6.6
Roadless	1.11	2.2
	1.12	3.3
	1.13	3.5
	1.5	3.6
	2.2	
	3.1	
	3.3	
	3.4	
	5.41	
	5.42	
	6.6	
Wilderness	1.11	1.1
	1.12	1.5
	1.13	
	1.5	
Special Designations	1.11	1.1
	1.12	1.5
	1.13	2.2
	1.5	3.1
	2.2	3.4
	3.1	4.21
	3.3	4.2
	3.4	4.4
	4.21	8.22
	4.3	
4.4		
8.22		

Fire Management Zones

Fire Management Zones are introduced in this section to facilitate the discussion of Geographic Areas that follows.

Rio Grande National Forest is proposing to implement Strategic Fire Management Zones that are most applicable at the Geographic Area level. These zones are not a mapped feature. Assigning strategic wildfire management zones supports decision makers before ignition occurs, by pre-assessing areas for wildland fire (prescribed fire and wildfire) risks and benefits. Three strategic fire management zones are proposed:



OX CART FIRE IN THE SANGRE DE CRISTO WILDERNESS, JUNE 2013.

1. The Fire for Resource Benefit for Maintenance (FRB-M) zone
2. The Fire for Resource Benefit for Restoration and Protection (FRB-RP) zone
3. The Resource Protection (RP) zone, which includes the wildland urban interface (WUI).

Fire for Resource Benefit - Maintenance zone (FRB-M)

This zone applies to the Wilderness and Roadless Geographic Areas. These areas present a lower risk to resource values from a wildfire, there is little threat to communities, and conditions allow natural resources to benefit from wildland fire. Managing wildfire to meet resource objectives in this zone is the least constrained. Ecological maintenance is accomplished by managing wildland fire under a wide range of weather, fuel moistures, and other environmental conditions. The use of prescribed fire to meet specific resource objectives is appropriate in this zone.



FIREWEED IN PAPOOSE FIRE BURNED AREA.

Fire for Resource Benefit - Restoration and Protection (FRB-RP) zone

This zone is applied to the General Forest Geographic Area where current conditions may put some natural resource values at varying degrees of risk for damage from wildfire. Mechanical treatments and prescribed burning may be used to promote ecological restoration before using wildfire under a wider range of weather, fuel moistures, and other environmental conditions. Wildfires that burn in this zone can benefit natural resources under more limited conditions.

Wildfires in this area could be managed for multiple objectives. For example, a portion of a wildfire may threaten resources that may require fire suppression or point protection, but allowing other portions of the same fire to burn may meet resource objectives by providing ecological objectives. Managing wildfires to meet resource objectives in this zone can be constrained in some areas due to fuel conditions and the risk to natural resources from wildfire.

Some acreage within this zone presents a lower risk to natural resource values, and conditions there allow resources to benefit from wildland fire. Ecological maintenance is accomplished by managing wildland fire under a wide range of weather, fuel moistures, and other environmental conditions. Wildfire starts in this zone are carefully assessed to determine suppression needs dependent on values at risk and the area's resilience to fire and potential benefits.

Resource Protection (Wildland Urban Interface) zone (RP)

This zone contains resources where conditions put natural resources and communities at high risk of damage from wildfire. Managing wildfires to meet resource objectives in this zone is not considered due to potential negative consequences to natural resource values, critical infrastructure, the Wildland Urban Interface, or nearby communities. Targeted ecological restoration and fuels reduction treatments may be needed in some areas to better safeguard communities and resources.

General Forest Geographic Area

Forest and grassland communities are characteristic of the General Forest Geographic Area, which is managed with a multiple-use emphasis to achieve a variety of goals. Resource use and management across the landscape would be balanced.

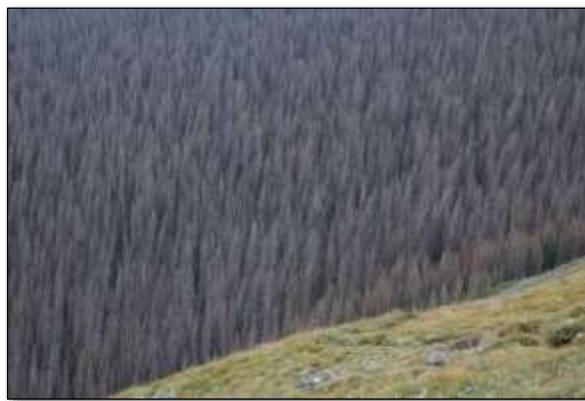
Timber is harvested using a full range of silvicultural treatments, methods, and prescriptions. Rotation periods are designated on the basis of species-specific needs. Vegetation is managed for wood production or to benefit other resources.

All vegetation management is sustainable and focused on restoring or maintaining resiliency in the face of changing environmental conditions. Resource management allows for flexibility and the ability to adapt in accordance with resource response. Management follows a plan-act-monitor-evaluate process.

Assessments 1 and 3 identified large-scale changes in the current conditions on the Rio Grande. Large-scale spruce beetle outbreaks have resulted in the Forest-wide infestation of 588,000 acres of mature Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*). This outbreak will have long-lasting effects on all aspects of the forest, including but not limited to carbon storage, recreation access, timber harvest, and wildlife habitat. These effects are highly variable and may be positive or negative. To capture the existing value of the dead trees and begin to restore the habitat, an increase in the volume harvested is anticipated for the near term (next 10 years). After 10 years, the dead spruce likely would no longer be viable as a commercial sawtimber, and harvest values are anticipated to be reduced.

Chapter 60 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 provides direction for the evaluation of timber and forest vegetation resources and the development of related plan components. The 2012 Planning Rule requires that when revising a Forest Plan, the Responsible Official must review and determine acreage that is not suitable for timber production as well as acreage that "may be suitable" for timber production. Then, based on Management Area desired conditions, standards, and guidelines, the Forest Plan shall identify the acreage that is actually "suitable for timber production." The proposed and final Forest Plans will include other required elements such as the projected wood sale quantity, projected timber sale quantity, and sustained yield limit. For the purposes of the Proposed Action, at this time, only the acres that "may be suitable for timber production" are being included.

The biggest recent change on the forest is the current spruce beetle outbreak. The spruce beetle (*Dendroctonus rufipennis*) is a native insect that attacks and kills mature Engelmann spruce. Spruce beetles are a key disturbance agent in spruce-fir forests and historically have caused large, intense outbreaks over expansive areas. Since the early to mid-2000s, large spruce beetle outbreaks have occurred on several national forests in Colorado and Wyoming, including the Rio Grande. The 2013 Rio Grande National Forest Monitoring report estimates the cumulative infested area on the Forest at 480,000 acres, while 2015 aerial survey estimates increased this to 588,000 acres. Many areas affected by spruce beetle have 80–100% mortality of mature Engelmann spruce. Given that spruce-fir forests cover half the Forest and make up two-thirds of the current suitable timber base, this will have huge impacts on the Rio Grande National Forest’s timber harvest program.



SPRUCE TREES KILLED BY SPRUCE BEETLES.

The Forest Service vision for the timber sale program now and into the future is one of change and adaptation. For the upcoming decade, salvage harvest in the spruce-fir cover type will dominate the timber harvest program. It is anticipated that during the second decade of the plan, as the dead spruce loses more value, less salvage harvesting will be done and more green timber will be harvested in other forest types, such as mixed-conifer. Long term, the timber harvest program on the Rio Grande National Forest is expected to be smaller, as it will take many years for the spruce-fir forests to reach commercial size again.

Recent annual timber harvest on the Forest has been 40,000–45,000 CCF. The Forest plans to continue to salvage harvest at approximately the same levels. This includes material sold through timber sales as well as permits for other wood products. Since 2015, the Forest has been harvesting approximately 2,000–2,500 acres per year of sawtimber. This is higher than past levels due to the salvage of spruce. The Forest expects to continue at this level while the dead spruce retains its commercial value. After the commercial value is lost, harvest levels will decrease.

The current estimate of what “may be suitable” for timber production is 515,000 acres. The suitable timber base is not expected to change greatly from the base in the 1996 Forest Plan, as amended by the 2000 Timber Suitability Amendment. Currently, as described in that amendment, the “suitable timber” acreage is 315,000 acres. The “suitable timber” base in the new plan will be similar, with small changes due to boundary adjustments in specially designated areas, such as the Fremont Special Interest Area, changes related to other special interest areas, and changes due to the 2010 Colorado Roadless Rule

The area has a well-developed transportation system that allows for easy access and movement of forest products and livestock while providing for visitor and employee safety. Roads are located in the proper locations to avoid excess impacts from sedimentation or erosion.

Ecosystems would be resilient to the impacts of wildfire, and wildland fire has predominantly positive benefits to ecosystems and resources. Lands in this Geographic Area are maintained at a

moderate to low risk with high potential benefit conditions relative to fire. Wildfire is managed to meet resource objectives under a wide range of environmental conditions; however, under more extreme burning conditions or where infrastructure or other values are threatened, fires may be suppressed. The landscape is resilient to the impacts of wildfire. Over time, risks to natural resources are reduced to allow more areas to be considered for wildfire maintenance.

Where appropriate, quality forage and cover for bighorn sheep, deer, elk, lynx, and other native wildlife as well as livestock would be available.

Insect and disease populations are managed at endemic levels. Wildfires managed for resource benefit and prescribed fire are used under acceptable conditions to move toward desired conditions.

Visitors should expect to see managed but natural-appearing forested stands. Recent vegetation treatments are visible but blend with the landscape over time.

Visitors could anticipate frequent contact with other forest users along recreation trails and in developed and dispersed recreation sites.

Water quality and quantity are managed to be maintained or restored. Riparian values and habitat are maintained or restored using active management where appropriate.

A variety of Management Areas (from the 1996 Forest Plan) would fit under this Geographic Area, including but not limited to Areas [3.3](#), [4.3](#), [5.11](#), [5.13](#), [5.41](#), [5.42](#), and [6.6](#). Each Management Area has a more specific management emphasis based on the overall theme of the area.

Primitive Wilderness Geographic Area

This Primitive Wilderness Geographic Area is managed to protect and perpetuate natural ecological processes and conditions. Natural ecological conditions are not measurably affected by human use. These areas are managed to protect the Wilderness character described in the Wilderness Act of 1964 for which they were established. Currently about 430,000 acres, or 23 percent, of the Rio Grande has been designated as Primitive Wilderness Geographic Area.

Fire is a natural process that influences vegetative type, distribution, and structure. Ecosystems are resilient to the impacts of wildfire, and wildland fire has predominantly positive benefits to ecosystems and resources. Lands within this zone are maintained in a predominantly low risk with high potential benefit condition relative to wildland fire.

The Primitive Wilderness Geographic Area is not included in the suitable timber base.

The Primitive Wilderness Geographic Area encompasses Management Areas 1.11 – Wilderness-Pristine, 1.12 – Wilderness-Primitive, 1.13 – Wilderness-Semi-Primitive, and [1.5](#) from the 1996



WETLAND IN WEMINUCHE WILDERNESS.

Forest Plan. The 1996 Forest Plan divided these areas into three separate management areas designated for the varying levels of solitude, risk, and challenge. The entire area is managed as designated Wilderness. Parts of four designated Wilderness areas are within Rio Grande National Forest. All are administered by more than one Forest Service unit, and each one has a designated lead Forest that directs management. Each of the four Wilderness areas has a specific wilderness plan that directs and guides management within the area. Because site-specific direction is incorporated within other tools, the Forest Service is proposing to combine the three Management Areas, 1.11, 1.12, and 1.13, into [Proposed Management Area 1.1](#).

Roadless Geographic Area

The Roadless Geographic area emphasizes protection of Roadless area values and characteristics. The Colorado Roadless Rule was enacted on July 3, 2012. The Roadless Rule provided management direction to conserve 4.2 million acres of National Forest System land in Colorado for Roadless area values, including 518,600 acres in 53 areas on the Rio Grande.

The Colorado Roadless rule created an additional layer of management for the Rio Grande and established two designations: Roadless and Upper Tier Roadless, which are addressed below. To better incorporate that direction and simplify decision making in identified roadless areas, that management prescription is incorporated as a Geographic Area with two newly established management areas, Management Areas 3.5 and 3.6.

These acres are not to be included as part of the identified suitable timber base.

The areas designated under the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule on the Rio Grande National Forest are listed in Table 1.3.

The intent stated in the Rule “is to protect roadless values by restricting tree cutting, sale, and removal; road construction and reconstruction; and linear construction zones within Colorado Roadless Areas, with narrowly focused exceptions.”² These restrictions are described in the desired

condition statements for the newly established Management Areas, which are detailed below.



ELK GRAZING IN POLE CREEK CRA.

² Federal Register. Volume 77, Number 128. Tuesday, July 3, 2012. Pp 39602–39612.

Table 1.3. Rio Grande NF Roadless Areas established by the 2012 Roadless Rule

Roadless Area Name	Includes Upper Tier Acres	Roadless Area Name	Includes Upper Tier Acres
Alamosa River	X	La Garita	X
Antora Meadows-Bear Creek	X	Lake Fork	X
Beartown	X	Lower East Bellows	X
Beaver Mountain	X	Middle Alder	X
Bennett Mountain-Blowout-Willow Creek-Lion Point-Greenie Mountain	X	Miller Creek	
Big Buck-Kitty-Ruby	X	Pole Creek	
Box-Road Canyon	X	Pole Mountain-Finger Mesa	X
Bristol Head	X	Red Mountain	X
Butterfly		Ruby Lake	X
Chama Basin	X	Sawlog	X
Conejos River-Lake Fork		Sheep Mountain	X
Copper Mountain-Sulphur	X	Silver Lakes-Stunner	X
Cotton Creek		Snowshoe Mountain	X
Crestone		Spectacle Lake	
Cumbres	X	Spruce Hole-Sheep Creek	X
Deep Creek-Boot Mountain	X	Stunner Pass-Dolores Canyon	X
Dorsey Creek	X	Sulphur Tunnel	
Elkhorn Peak	X	Summit Peak-Elwood Pass	X
Four Mile Creek	X	Taylor Canyon	X
Fox Creek	X	Tewksberry	X
Fox Mountain	X	Tobacco Lakes	X
Gibbs Creek		Trout Mountain-Elk Mountain	X
Gold Creek-Cascade Creek	X	Ute Pass	X
Hot Springs		Wason Park	X
Indiana Ridge	X	Wightman Fork-Upper Burro	X
Kitty Creek		Wightman Fork-Lookout	X
		Willow Mountain	X

Roadless areas characteristics defined in the Rule include:

- High quality or undisturbed soil, water, and air
- Sources of public drinking water
- Diversity of plant and animal communities
- Habitat for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate, and sensitive species, and for those species dependent on large, undisturbed areas of land
- Primitive, semi-primitive, nonmotorized, and semi-primitive motorized classes of dispersed recreation
- Reference landscapes
- Natural-appearing landscapes with high scenic quality
- Traditional cultural properties and sacred sites
- Other locally identified unique characteristics.

Fire is considered a natural process that influences vegetative type, distribution, and structure. Ecosystems are resilient to the impacts of wildfire, and wildland fire has predominantly positive benefits to ecosystems and resources. Lands within this zone are maintained in a predominantly low risk with high potential benefit condition relative to wildland fire.

This Geographic Area incorporates all or parts of the following Management Areas from the 1996 Forest Plan 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, [1.5](#), [2.2](#), [3.1](#), [3.3](#), [3.4](#), [5.41](#), [5.42](#), and [6.6](#). Because Colorado Roadless Areas were developed separately from the Forest Plan, many of the 1996 Management Areas were assumed by these new designations. Some of these Management Areas would persist in this Geographic Area designation while the remaining Management Areas would no longer be applicable or appropriate. The Forest Service is proposing to establish two new management areas: Proposed [Management Area 3.5](#) would include designated Roadless areas, and Proposed [Management Area 3.6](#) would include Upper Tier Roadless areas. These proposed Management Areas are described below.

More detailed direction for this Geographic Area is contained in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule (36 CFR Part 294).

Specially Designated Geographic Area

Specially Designated Geographic Area designations include Agency designations such as Research Natural Areas; Wheeler Geologic Area; Wild, Recreational, or Scenic River segments; Scenic Byways; and areas designated for rare or unique botanical, cultural, geologic, historical, or scenic values. Where appropriate, features are interpreted for the public. The Proposed Action includes consideration of several new designated areas as identified in the Need to Change document. The following areas will be considered for designation in the analysis: the Continental Divide Trail, Old Spanish Trail, Natural Arch, Cumbres and Toltec National Historic Landmark, and Mt. Blanca Massif. New information regarding the boundary of the John C. Fremont Winter Camp Special Interest Area will also be considered.

Ecosystems are resilient to the impacts of wildfire, and wildland fire has predominantly positive benefits to ecosystems and resources. Lands in this zone are maintained at a moderate to low risk

with high potential benefit conditions relative to fire. Wildfires are managed to meet resource objectives under a wide range of environmental conditions; however, fires may be suppressed under more extreme burning conditions. The landscape is resilient to the impacts of wildfire. Over time, risks to natural resources are reduced to allow more areas to be considered for wildfire maintenance.

The Specially Designated Geographic Area is not included in the suitable timber base.

Ecological values are in balance with human occupancy, and consideration is given to both. Resource management activities may occur where authorized, but natural ecological processes and resulting pattern normally predominate. These areas are generally characterized by natural-appearing landscapes. An array of management tools may be used to restore or maintain relatively natural patterns of ecological process; thus, some evidence of human activities will be noticeable. Uses, including mechanized use, will vary from area to area and may vary by season. The following previously identified Management Areas from the 1996 Forest Plan were included in this Geographic Area: 1.11, 1.12, 1.13, [1.5](#), [2.2](#), [3.1](#), [3.3](#), [3.4](#), [4.21](#), [4.3](#), [4.4](#), and [8.22](#).



CONTINENTAL DIVIDE NATIONAL SCENIC TRAIL NEAR STONY PASS, HEADWATERS OF THE RIO GRANDE.

Tactical Domain

Management Areas

The 1996 Forest Plan had several Management Areas. Amendments to the original decision provided additional layers of direction and management emphasis resulting additional layers of management direction that were challenging to both Forest managers and the public. Proposed changes include creation of two new Management Areas related to the Colorado Roadless Rule, reduction of some Management Areas, and combining some current Management Areas to better facilitate clarity and understanding of the direction. The Proposed Geographic Areas, how the 1996 Forest Plan Management Areas fit within, and the proposed changed Management Areas are shown in Table 1.2. Two maps, one showing the proposed Management Areas and the other showing the proposed Management Areas within the Geographic Areas, are included at the end of this document.

Proposed Management Area 1.1 – Designated Wilderness

Wilderness can be designated only by Congress and is managed in accordance with the Wilderness Act of 1964. Natural succession occurs in all vegetation types and is influenced by natural processes and disturbances. Structure, composition, function, and spatial distribution of vegetative types are the result of natural succession. Where no natural disturbance has occurred, vegetation is mostly in late-successional stages. Age and structure classes may vary where natural disturbance agents, such as fire or insects, have influenced the succession process. Plant species are native and indigenous to the immediate area. Non-native invasive species are limited and increases are controlled. Forage for wildlife, permitted livestock, and packstock is available in meadows and natural openings, although availability may be limited due to topography and short growing seasons. Human influences on vegetation is minimal. Timber harvest is prohibited and this area is not included in the suitable timber base.

Wildlife species are buffered from human influences. No additional non-native plant or animal species are introduced. Human influence on physical features, such as soil and geologic materials, is minimal. Human influence on aquatic life and riparian areas and processes is minimal in most areas. The composition, structure, and function of aquatic ecosystems are minimally disturbed by human influence. Stocking is used as a tool to enhance Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species and enhance recreational opportunities. Water impoundments, ditches, and diversions may be present in Wilderness areas.

Wilderness areas are managed for solitude; users are expected to be familiar with and use primitive skills in an environment that offers a high degree of risk and challenge. Success or failure is directly dependent on the ability, knowledge, and initiative of the visitor. Contact with other users or Forest Service personnel decreases with increasing distance from the entry portals. Near the entry portals, users may have contact with larger groups. Commercial permitting for day-use activities is allowed in high-use areas. Evidence of established campsites and base camps may be present. An element of discovery is maintained. The presence of interpretive signs, markers, and posts decreases with increasing distance from the entry portals, though cairns may be present. Near the entry portals, trails are marked at intersections to indicate routes. Evidence of cultural and historic sites may be present, and these sites may be signed and interpreted near entry points. Structures or facilities may be present but only as necessary for resource protection when less obtrusive measures were not successful in the past.

Trails are the primary mode of travel from the entry portals. Trail systems are maintained for user safety and comfort. Bridges may be present when needed for resource protection or user safety. The presence of constructed trails decreases with increasing distance from entry portals, and travel deep within Wilderness is primarily cross-country with no established trails. User-created trails may exist but are not maintained or designated on maps or trail guides.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use except where previously delineated.

Evidence of past mining activity may be present but is rare. Wilderness areas are withdrawn from locatable mineral entry and are legally unavailable for oil and gas leasing.

Visibility is generally unimpaired. Smoke from natural fires may be visible. The Scenic integrity is Very High and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is Primitive.

Each wilderness area has a prepared wilderness management plan that describes specific levels of management. Management Plans are prepared in cooperation with other managing units or agencies.

Management Area 1.5 – Eligible Wild Rivers

Eligible Wild River areas are managed to protect and perpetuate eligible Wild River segments and adjacent areas. These areas are eligible for official designation based on the presence of one or more “outstandingly remarkable” feature: scenic, recreation, geologic, wildlife, or fisheries values. The width of the area may vary to protect outstanding values, but at least one-quarter mile on either side of the segment is included.

Existing eligible Wild Rivers include El Rito Azul, Hansen Creek, Middle Fork Conejos River, North Fork Conejos River, Toltec Creek, and Saguache Creek.

The landscape is predominantly natural appearing. Vegetative composition and structure are influenced by biological processes and conditions. Due to the proximity of the streams, there is a greater than average diversity of native plant and animal species.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use.

Road construction is not authorized in these areas.

Management activity is dependent on the projected future designation. Outstandingly remarkable features are protected until a suitability study is completed and final recommendation of designation is made.

No motorized travel occurs within one-quarter mile of the stream or river segment.

These areas are not available for oil and gas leasing.

The Scenic Integrity is Very High and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class is Primitive.

Management Area 2.2 – Research Natural Areas

Research Natural Areas preserve representative areas that typify important forest, shrubland, grassland, alpine, aquatic, geologic, or other natural environments. These areas often may also have special or unique characteristics of scientific importance. The management emphasis of these areas focuses on protecting or enhancing unique or exemplary ecosystems designated for non-manipulative research, monitoring and education.

Research Natural Areas contribute to the preservation and maintenance of key elements of biological diversity at the genetic, species, population, community, and landscape levels.

Research Natural Areas are intended as baseline areas for measuring ecological changes, and as control areas for evaluation and monitoring.

Develop comprehensive management plans as needed.

Where feasible, manage undesirable non-native plant and animal species.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate or authorized use when it is not in direct conflict with resources values that prompted establishment of the area.

The Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class for these Research Natural Areas is Semi-Primitive Nonmotorized.

Management Area 3.1 – Special Interest Area—Use and Interpretation Emphasis

Special Interest Areas are managed to protect or enhance unique characteristics that occur across the Forest. Special Interest Areas typically contain unique botanical, geologic, historical, scenic, or cultural areas and values. Management emphasizes developing and interpreting some of these areas for public education and recreation.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use.

Proposed activities meet the Adopted Scenic Integrity Objective and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Semi-Primitive Motorized.

Management Area 3.3 – Backcountry

The landscape is predominantly natural appearing and relatively undisturbed by humans. Natural processes within the context of the range of natural variability (insects, disease, and fire) are generally allowed to occur with minimal human intervention. Prescribed natural fire plans should be developed and Confine/Contain strategies and minimal-impact suppression techniques emphasized on wildfires. Management-ignited fires may be used to mimic natural disturbance regimes.

There is a high probability of experiencing solitude and opportunity for a high degree of self-reliance, challenge, and risk. Facilities are minimal and exist primarily for site protection. Improvements to enhance recreation use, such as signs, may be present, but are rustic in style. Trailheads providing access to these areas are outside the area and offer information and directional signing. Cross-country motorized travel is limited to snow machines in the winter not otherwise restricted.

Trails provide a full range of challenging recreation opportunities. These include biking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and motorized travel on designated trails. Hunting and fishing opportunities are available for those seeking a more remote experience. No road building occurs within the area, and new trail construction is rare.

The allocation of miles of motorized or non-motorized travel ways is that the classification of trails (motorized or non-motorized) identified in the Forest Plan will not substantially change over the planning period. While individual travel ways might change from non-motorized to motorized or vice versa, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum will stay Semi-Primitive.

Generally, non-recreational special uses such as electronic sites and utility corridors are excluded from Backcountry areas.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized within this Management Prescription.

Management Area 3.4 – Designated and Eligible Scenic Rivers

Scenic river corridors are managed to protect and perpetuate river segments that are either eligible for Scenic River designation or have already designated as such. As of yet no rivers have been designated, but some eligible segments have been identified. Eligibility requires one or more “outstandingly remarkable” feature, which may include scenic, recreational, geologic, wildlife, or fisheries values. The width of the area may vary to protect the outstanding values, but at least one-quarter mile on either side of the segment is included.

Rivers on the Rio Grande identified as eligible Scenic Rivers include Archuleta Creek, West Fork Rio Chama, East Fork Rio Chama, Lower Rio de los Pinos, part of Medano Creek, part of South Fork Rio Grande, Rio Grande (Box Canyon), and West Bellows.

Scenic River landscapes are generally natural appearing. Vegetative composition and structure is influenced by biological processes and condition. The proximity of streams results in a greater than average density of plant and animal species.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use. These lands are available and authorized for oil and gas leasing with a Controlled Surface Use Stipulation. These lands are part of the Suitable timber base.

Proposed Management Area 3.5 – Colorado Roadless Area

Colorado Roadless Areas are generally undeveloped parts of the Forest that provide a variety of settings at different elevations. They are managed to protect roadless characteristics and to maintain plant and animal habitats that are shaped primarily through natural processes. These areas provide backcountry recreational experience to the public in areas with less evidence of human activities.

Landscapes in these areas are predominantly natural appearing and relatively undisturbed by humans. Natural processes within the context of the range of natural variability (insects, disease, and fire) are generally allowed to occur with minimal human intervention.

The probability of experiencing solitude in these areas is high. Frequent opportunities for challenge and risk require a degree of self-reliance. Facilities are minimal and exist primarily for site protection. Recreational improvements, such as signs, may be present. Trailheads offer information and directional signing. Cross-country motorized travel is limited to snow machines in the winter (where other restrictions do not apply).

Trails provide a wide range of challenging recreation opportunities including horseback riding, mountain bike riding, and motorized travel on designated routes. Hunting and fishing opportunities are available for those seeking a more remote experience. No new road construction occurs within the areas.

Miles of motorized and nonmotorized travel will not substantially change over the planning period. Although individual travel ways could change from nonmotorized to motorized or vice-versa, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum would remain Semi-Primitive.

Trees may be cut, sold, and removed if the Responsible Official determines that the activity is consistent with the applicable land management plan. One or more of the roadless area characteristics will be maintained or improved over the long-term, with exceptions and only if one of the following conditions exists:

1. The Regional Forester determines that tree cutting, sale, or removal is needed to reduce hazardous fuels to an at-risk community.
2. The Regional Forester determines that tree cutting, sale, or removal is needed outside of the community protection zone and where wildland fire disturbance is a significant risk that could adversely affect a municipal water supply system or the maintenance of that system.
3. Tree cutting, sale, or removal is needed to maintain or restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition, structure, and processes.
4. Tree cutting, sale, or removal is needed to improve habitat for federally threatened, endangered, proposed, or Agency designated sensitive species; in coordination with the Colorado Department of Natural Resources.
5. Tree cutting, sale, or removal is incidental to the implementation of a management activity not otherwise prohibited.
6. Tree cutting, sale, or removal is needed and appropriate for personal or administrative use as provided for in 36 CFR 223, subpart A.

A road or temporary road could only be constructed and reconstructed if the Responsible Official determines that:

1. A road is needed pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights, or is provided for by statute or treaty.
2. Road realignment is needed to prevent irreparable resource damage that arises from the design, location, use, or deterioration of a forest road that cannot be mitigated by road maintenance.
3. Road reconstruction is needed for road safety improvement.
4. The Regional Forester has determined that a road is needed to allow for construction, reconstruction, or maintenance of an authorized water conveyance structure.
5. A temporary road is needed to protect health and safety in cases of imminent flood, fire, or other catastrophic event.
6. The Regional Forester has determined that a temporary road is needed to facilitate tree cutting or removal within the first half mile of a community protection zone to reduce wildfire hazard to community of water conveyance structure.
7. A temporary road is needed pursuant to the exploration or development of an existing oil and gas lease that does not prohibit road construction or reconstruction.

A linear construction zone may not be constructed except when the Regional Forester determines that one is needed:

- Pursuant to reserve or outstanding rights or as provided in a statute or treaty
- For construction, reconstruction, or maintenance of an authorized water conveyance structure.

Additionally, the Regional Forest must approve projects for:

- The construction, reconstruction, or maintenance of power lines or telecommunication lines
- Construction, reconstruction, or maintenance of a pipeline for oil and gas leasing.

Other restriction and prohibitions are described in detail in the Colorado Roadless Rule direction (36 CFR Part 294).

Proposed Management Area 3.6 – Upper Tier Colorado Roadless Area

Upper Tier Roadless Areas are described in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule and are identified in Table 1.3.

These areas are generally undeveloped parts of the Forest that provide a variety of settings at different elevations. They are managed to protect roadless characteristics and to maintain plant and animal habitats that are shaped primarily through natural processes. These areas provide backcountry recreational experiences to the public in areas with less evidence of human activities.

Limited vegetation manipulation may occur in this Management Area. Trees may be cut, sold, and removed only when incidental to implementation of an authorized management activity. For further clarification refer to the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule (36 CFR 223). Trees may also be cut, sold, and removed when needed for personal or administrative use as provided for in the rule.

Landscapes in these areas are predominantly natural appearing and relatively undisturbed by humans. Natural processes within the context of the range of natural variability (insects, disease, and fire) are generally allowed to occur with minimal human intervention.

The probability of experiencing solitude in these areas is high. Frequent opportunities for challenge and risk require a degree of self-reliance. Facilities are minimal and exist primarily for site protection. Recreational improvements, such as signs, may be present. Trailheads offer information and directional signing. Cross-country motorized travel is limited to snow machines in the winter (where other restrictions do not apply).

Trails provide a range of challenging recreation opportunities including horseback riding, mountain bike riding, and motorized travel on designated routes. Hunting and fishing opportunities are available. Road and trail construction and reconstruction follows the direction outlined in the 2012 Colorado Roadless Rule (36 CFR 223). Generally, roads may only be approved for construction where there are outstanding rights or a previous statute or treaty that prescribes the need. Road construction may be authorized when there is an imminent threat to public health and safety, for example in a flood, fire, or other catastrophic event that requires intervention to reduce the loss of life or property.

The amount of motorized and nonmotorized travel ways will not substantially change over the planning period. Although individual travel ways may change from nonmotorized to motorized or vice-versa, the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum is Semi-Primitive.

Trees may be cut, sold, and removed if the Responsible Official determines that the activity is consistent with the Forest Plan and:

- Is incidental to a management activity not otherwise prohibited
- Is needed and appropriate for personal or administrative use as provided in 36 CFR 223, Subpart A.

A road may only be constructed or reconstructed if the Responsible Official determines that:

- A road is needed pursuant to reserved or outstanding rights, or is provided for by statute or treaty
- A road is needed to protect public health and safety in cases of an imminent threat of flood, fire, or other catastrophic event, that without intervention would cause the loss of life or property.

Management Area 4.3 – Dispersed and Developed Recreation

Dispersed and Developed Recreation areas are designated mostly along road corridors where developed and undeveloped recreation opportunities can be managed as an integrated resource. These popular areas generally have access to water features or other natural attractions and offer a more social recreation experience with frequent visitor contacts.

Vegetation composition and structure are managed to meet the recreation objectives for this area, maintain vegetation cover for wildlife, and protect soil stability. Commercial harvest is authorized for reasons other than production of forest products.

Insects and disease are managed to maintain the recreation resource.

Summer homes, resorts, and organizational camps are present and managed to provide unique recreation opportunities. Developed recreation sites and facilities, such as campgrounds and picnic sites, are maintained and updated to meet customer needs. Management actions in dispersed sites maintains the natural characteristics that make the area popular.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified.

Management Area 5.11 – General Forest and Intermingled Rangelands

This Management Area allows for a variety of management options, including livestock grazing, wildlife habitat, dispersed recreation, exploration, development of minerals and energy resources, and timber harvest. Characterized by forest and grassland communities, this area is managed with a multiple-use emphasis to achieve a variety of goals.

Timber is harvested to meet management goals using a full range of silvicultural options; however, even-aged systems are more likely to occur. Where timber harvest is planned, rotation periods are longer and entries are less frequent than in Area 5.13, which is described below. Timber management activities focus on what is retained in the stand instead of on wood production. All successional stages are represented. Management allows the perpetuation of natural landscape diversity (composition, structure, and function) and includes consideration

within a spatial context—for example: what species, what kind of stand structure, and what kind of landscape patterns are natural, by ecosystem.

Management actions ensure that there is sufficient habitat for wildlife dispersion between undeveloped areas of the Forest.

The area has a well-developed transportation system with numerous open roads that offer commercial access and roaded recreational opportunities, while roads with restricted access offer nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Watersheds, scenic resources, and wildlife habitat are restored in locations where past management actions have reduced resource effectiveness.

Appropriate settings are offered that are suitable for a broad range of recreation opportunities. Recreation facilities are improved on the basis of user demand. Users can expect to have a more social experience.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized in this area.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified Roded. Activities undertaken meet the prescribed Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Management Area 5.13 – Forest Products

This area allows for a full range of activities with an emphasis on the production of commercial wood products. These areas have a high potential for timber growth, and operations focus on wood production. Suitable forested areas are maintained with commercially valuable species at ages, densities, and sizes that allow growth rates and stand conditions that are conducive to providing a sustained yield of forest products.

Timber management is accomplished in a manner that allows the perpetuation of natural landscape diversity (composition, structure, and function) and includes consideration within a spatial context—for example: what species, what kind of stand structure, and what kind of landscape patterns are natural, by ecosystem. All succession stages are represented, including old growth. Mature stands are identified for old growth characteristics.

Management actions ensure that sufficient quality habitat for wildlife dispersion exists between undeveloped areas of the forest.

The area has a well-developed transportation system with numerous open roads that offer commercial access and roaded recreational opportunities, while restricted access roads offer nonmotorized recreation opportunities.

Forest visitors can expect to experience managed forest. Managed stands will have evidence of management, including stumps, slash, skid trails, and soil disturbance.

Opportunities exist for exploration and development of mineral and energy resources.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified Roded. Activities undertaken meet the prescribed Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Management Area 5.41 – Deer and Elk Winter Range

These areas are managed to provide quality winter range forage, cover, and solitude for deer, elk, and other wildlife species. Winter Range areas are made up of forested and non-forested habitat generally at lower elevations of the Forest.

Vegetation is managed to sustain healthy plant communities that provide a variety of plants for food and cover.

The transportation system provides access for vegetation treatments and activities but reduce habitat fragmentation across the landscape.

To minimize resource conflicts on and off of National Forest System lands and to offer recreation opportunities, habitat management criteria should be developed in coordination with the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife along with adjacent private and Federal land owners.

Human activities are managed during the winter season to allow wildlife to effectively use the area.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized. Grazing systems could be developed in cooperation with state and federal agencies and adjacent landowners so that all lands can be considered in the development of vegetation management objectives for an area.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified Roaded. Activities undertaken meet the prescribed Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Adjustment to this Management Area is anticipated on the basis of remapping of bighorn sheep herds by the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Management Area 5.42 – Special Wildlife Areas – Bighorn Sheep

Special Wildlife Areas for bighorn sheep are maintained for established herds and are characterized by rocky slopes, cliffs, and open grasslands with scattered stands of trees. Vegetation management may be used to enhance or maintain bighorn sheep habitat. To assure species viability management emphasizes maintenance and improvement of the habitat characteristics that bighorn sheep depend on.

Herd objectives are established in cooperation



ROCKY MOUNTAIN BIGHORN EWES ON LONG RIDGE NEAR CREEDE.

with the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife.

Established viewing areas should provide interpretation of the resources and management.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized. Maintain a buffer between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep, to prevent interaction.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified Roaded. Activities undertaken meet the prescribed Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Adjustment to this Management Area is anticipated based on remapping completed by the Colorado Department of Parks and Wildlife mapping of bighorn sheep herds.

Management Area 6.6 – Grassland Resource Production

Grassland Resource Production areas are managed to produce forage. Management in these areas emphasizes vegetation associated with grassland ecosystems to maintain and improve desired vegetation conditions for livestock, wildlife, and recreational stock. The areas are characterized by a mix of grassland and forested ecosystems that features open meadows and other grasslands, intermixed with stands of aspens and conifers.

Plant communities are managed in a variety of successional stages to provide biological diversity of both plant and animal species. A variety of tools and methods are applied, including but not limited to timber harvest, prescribed burning, and planting. Timber harvest is managed for objectives other than forest products.

Visitors to these areas can expect to see livestock and wildlife along with range improvements.

Livestock grazing is appropriate and authorized.

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified Roaded. Activities undertaken meet the prescribed Scenic Integrity Objectives.

Management Area 4.21 – Scenic Byways and Scenic Railroads

These areas are managed to protect or preserve the scenic and recreation values and uses in designated Scenic Byways and Scenic Railroad Corridors while concurrently managing the multiple-use values of the landscape. This management prescription applies to the Silver Thread and Los Caminos Antiguos Scenic Byways, and the Cumbres and Toltec Scenic Railroad.

Multiple-use management such as commercial timber harvest, wildlife management, recreation activities, and mineral extraction is allowed in these landscapes, which feature high-quality scenery. Features may be interpreted for the public. Facilities may be developed to enhance opportunities for viewing scenery and wildlife. All activities and interactions are managed to maintain the scenic beauty for which the area is designated.

Opportunities for solitude are limited. Visitors can expect frequent contact with other visitors. Roads, recreation facilities, range improvements, and other developments are evident but are managed to be in harmony with the natural environment. Recreation facilities could include scenic overlooks, interpretive signs, and rest areas as appropriate. Developed campgrounds are situated off of the main travel way. Trailheads are easily accessible, but also are off of the main travel way.

Road systems are well signed and are generally passable by a passenger car but can be gravel or paved. This area has access for motorized recreation activities off of the main travel ways.

Nonmotorized activities such as biking and horseback riding are focused on the available trails and roads.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use. This area is included in the suitable timber base.

All activities will meet the adopted Scenic Integrity Objective and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum Class is Modified Roaded.

Management Area 4.4 – Designated and Eligible Recreational Rivers

Recreational Rivers are managed to protect and perpetuate designated or eligible stream segments that have the one or more required “outstandingly remarkable” features that include scenic, recreational, geologic, wildlife, or fisheries values. The actual width of the area may vary to protect the outstanding values, but is at least one-quarter mile on either side of the stream. Existing diversion structures, rip-rap, or flood-control structures must be maintained.

Eligible Recreational Rivers from the 1996 Forest Plan include Medano Creek, South Fork Rio Grande, Lower Rio Grande, and Conejos Rivers.

Landscapes in these area are predominantly natural-appearing. Vegetative composition and structure are influenced by biological processes and conditions. Proximity to the stream results in greater than average diversity of plants and animal species.

Livestock grazing is an appropriate and authorized use. These areas are not included in the suitable timber base.

Activities undertaken will meet the adopted Scenic Integrity Objective, and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Modified.

Management Area 8.22 – Ski-based Resorts

These areas are managed for their existing or potential use as ski-based resort sites. Wolf Creek Ski Area lands are the only lands currently included in the Management Area. This is an area of concentrated use. Visitors can expect a high degree of interaction and many facilities associated with the ski resort industry.

Resources are managed to protect the recreation resource and ensure public safety, including management of insects and disease. Project implementation in this area maintains the possibility of winter sports recreation. Resource Management activities are designed and implemented to maintain or enhance existing resources.

Development in the area will be consistent with the terms and conditions of the Special Use Permit, including submission of a master development plan. These lands are not part of the suitable timber base. They are also withdrawn from locatable mineral entry, and grazing is not authorized or permitted.

Activities will meet the adopted Scenic Integrity Objective and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum class is Roaded Natural.

Table 1.4. Allowable activities in the proposed Management Areas

Allowable Activities	1.1	1.5	2.2	3.1	3.4	3.5	3.6	4.21	4.3	4.4	5.11	5.13	5.41	5.42	6.6	8.22
Timber vegetation management for fiber								X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
May be suitable for timber harvest								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Timber stand improvement								X	X		X	X	X	X	X	
Salvage/Sanitation Harvest				X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prescribed fire	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Naturally occurring fire	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Trail construction/reconstruction	X	X		X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Off road game retrieval											X	X	X	X	X	X
Off road travel for dispersed camping, firewood gathering, etc.								X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Full suppression of wildfires*	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Authorized grazing	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

*Full fire suppression is an option for any wildfire and is up to the discretion of the Line Officer.

The Forest Plan will present standards and guidelines as prescribed in the 2012 Planning Rule. Standards and guidelines place operational constraints on projects and activities that help achieve or maintain desired conditions. They should not direct processes for additional analysis or planning. Standards and guidelines can be applied at the Forest-wide, Geographic Area, or Management Area scale. As a starting point, Forest Service direction states that Forest Plans will include plan components including standard or guidelines for the following:

- Ecological integrity of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, and watersheds in the plan area
- Air quality; soils and soil productivity, including guidance to reduce soil erosion and sedimentation; and water quality
- Ecological integrity of riparian areas
- Contribution to social and economic sustainability
- Diversity of ecosystems and habitat types
- Ecological conditions in the plan area
- Integrated resource management to provide for ecosystem services and multiple uses
- Sustainable recreation including recreation settings, opportunities, and access; and scenic character
- Protection of cultural and historic resources
- Management of areas of tribal importance
- Protection of congressionally designated wilderness areas as well as management of areas recommended for wilderness designation
- Protection of designated Wild and Scenic Rivers as well as management of rivers found eligible or determined suitable
- Appropriate management of other designated areas or recommended designated areas
- Timber harvest not allowable for the purposes of timber production on unsuitable lands
- Soil, slope, or other watershed conditions would not be irreversibly damaged
- Protection of soil, watershed, fish, wildlife, recreation, and aesthetic resources
- Limits on the maximize size for openings (must be standards)
- Timber harvest only when in compliance with the resource protections
- Timber removal on a sustained yield basis
- Regeneration only of stands that generally have reached the culmination of mean annual increment of growth.

Adaptive Management Domain

The Adaptive Management Domain puts in place a process that implements plan direction, analyzes the impacts, monitors, and then evaluates adjustments that may be needed to be adaptive and responsive in a timely manner. Changes will be incorporated through interdisciplinary analysis and will include public involvement.

To be more responsive to necessary changes in the Forest Plan content, Forest Leadership will annually post proposed changes and the rationale for the changes, which could include annual monitoring results, on the Forest website. In conjunction with release of the changes, a stakeholder meeting would be held to discuss the changes proposed in detail followed by a comment period. Upon receiving and reviewing all comments the Responsible Official would determine the proper authority to be used in making necessary changes to the Plan content. The entire process would be open and transparent.

Changes to Plan Components requires a Forest Plan Amendment that could use any of the approved authorities available at the time. Changes to optional plan content, corrections in clerical errors to any content (including plan components), changes needed to conform to new statutory or regulatory requirements for which there is no discretion, and other changes to plan content except for changes to the substance of plan components or to the application of plan components to a specific areas in the planning area, may be adjusted through an Administrative Change. This would be done in compliance with the 2012 Planning Rule (36 CFR 219.7(f)) and Forest Service direction from Forest Service Handbook 1909.12 § 21.5.

Monitoring Domain

During the revision process, the existing Monitoring program will be reevaluated in accordance with direction contained in the 2012 Planning Rule and in Forest Service Handbook 1909.12. The monitoring program to be developed as part of the Forest Plan should be strategic, effective, and useful. Monitoring forms the basis for continuous improvement of the plan and the adaptive management process. Plan monitoring is one part of the overall approach. Broader-scale monitoring is driven by the Regional Forester and addresses relevant plan monitoring questions that are best answered at a geographic level.

Monitoring questions and measurable indicators of response will allow Forest personnel to measure management effectiveness and assess progress toward desired conditions. The intent of monitoring is to provide the Responsible Official with sufficient information to inform key management decisions about the success of the plan, not to fulfill other interests or purposes.

The 2012 Planning Rule does not require development of monitoring questions for every desired condition, objective, or other plan components. As with all other parts of Forest Plan development, monitoring questions and indicator measurements will use the best available science and will involve public participation. The Monitoring Program will address a minimum of eight topics, including:

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 ecological conditions 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 efforts of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land.

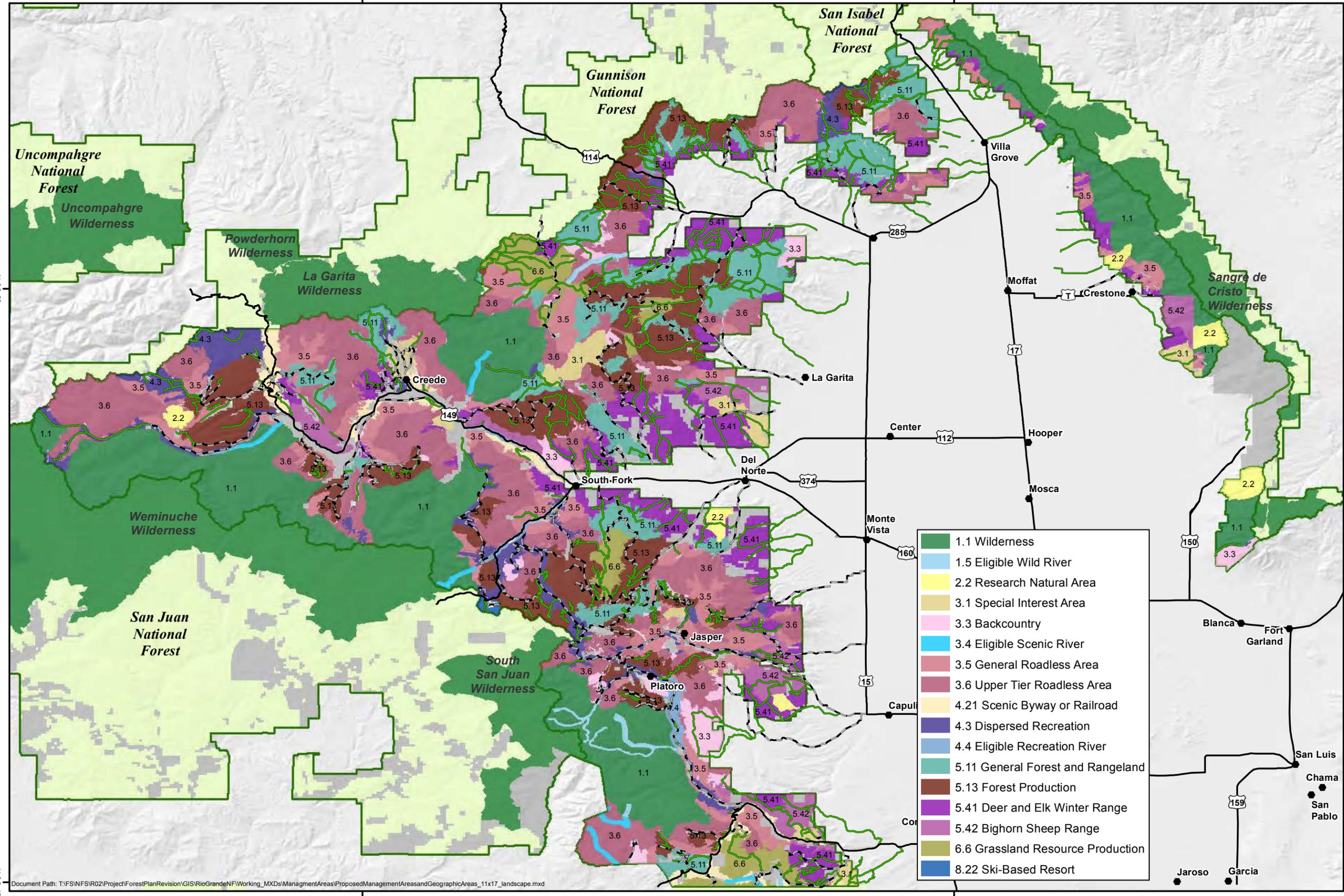
Some aspects of the monitoring program may be fulfilled by monitoring conducted by other entities than the Forest, such as but not limited to the Region's broader-scale monitoring program, other federal or state agencies, university researchers, tribes, and other interest groups working in collaboration with Forest staff.

In addition to the annual stakeholder meeting, a written report evaluating the monitoring program will be produced biennially and will be available to the public.



Rio Grande National Forest Proposed Management Areas

September 12
2016



- 1.1 Wilderness
- 1.5 Eligible Wild River
- 2.2 Research Natural Area
- 3.1 Special Interest Area
- 3.3 Backcountry
- 3.4 Eligible Scenic River
- 3.5 General Roadless Area
- 3.6 Upper Tier Roadless Area
- 4.21 Scenic Byway or Railroad
- 4.3 Dispersed Recreation
- 4.4 Eligible Recreation River
- 5.11 General Forest and Rangeland
- 5.13 Forest Production
- 5.41 Deer and Elk Winter Range
- 5.42 Bighorn Sheep Range
- 6.6 Grassland Resource Production
- 8.22 Ski-Based Resort

- Town
- Highway
- Lvl 2 Open Road
- Lvl 3-5 Open Road
- Wilderness
- USDA Forest Service
- Non-FS Land
- Forest Boundary

Created by:
USFS R2 Core Plan
Revision Team
GIS Specialist

Created: 9/8/2016
Coordinate System:
NAD 1983 UTM Zone 13N



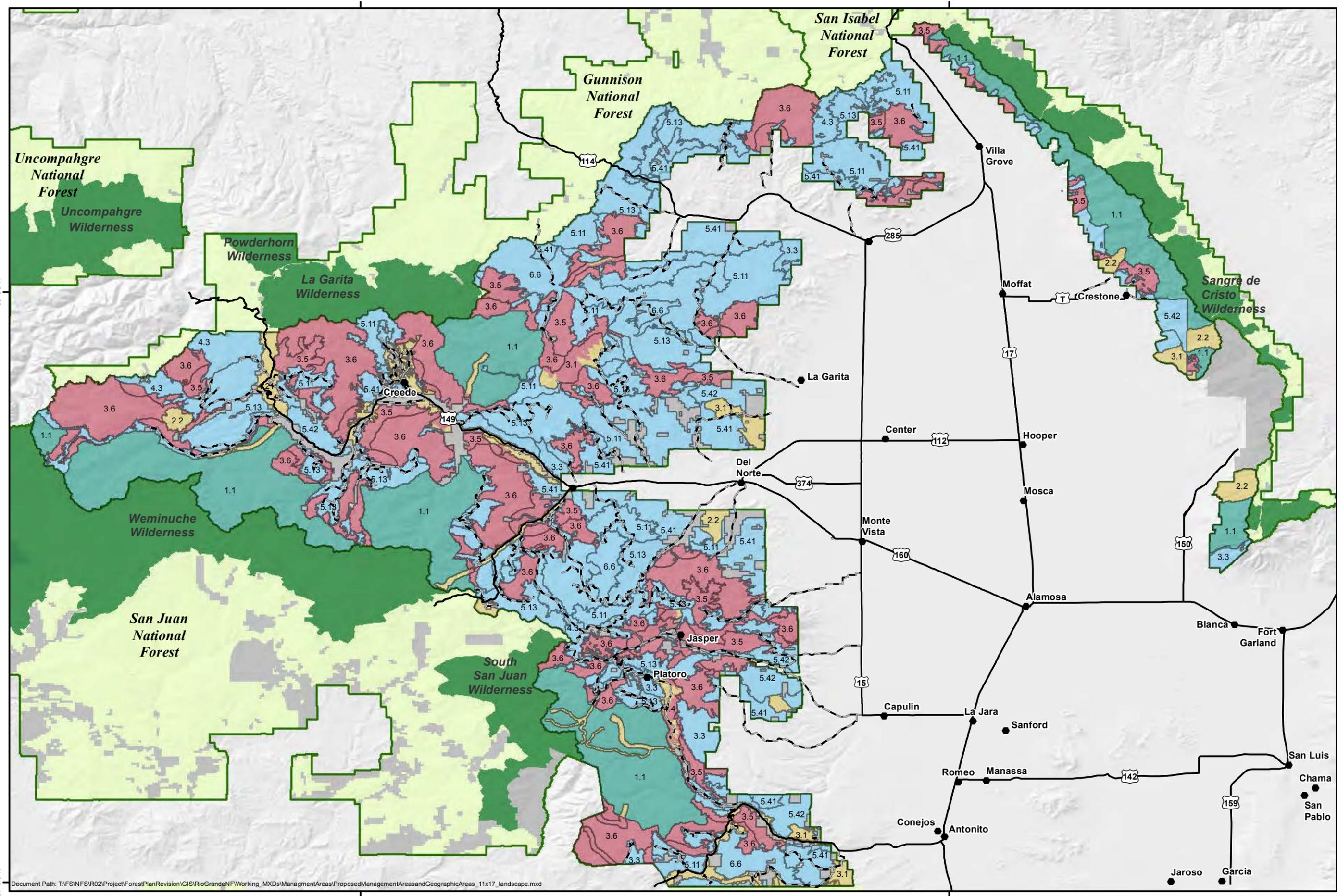
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Rio Grande National Forest Proposed Management Areas and Geographic Areas

September 12
2016



- Town
- Lvs 3-5 Open Road
- Highway
- Wilderness
- USDA Forest Service
- Non-FS Land
- Forest Boundary
- Geographic Area**
- Colorado Roadless Area
- General Forest
- Primitive-Wilderness
- Special Designation

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