

Preliminary Need to Change the Existing Custer and Gallatin Forest Plans



Forest Service

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Cover Photo: Shots across the Custer Gallatin National Forest Top Left to right Trees, Lake Plateau, Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness (T. Jones); Cattle graze, Long Pines, Sioux Ranger District; Bottom Left – Motorized Recreation (T. Jones); Elephanthead Mountain, Yellowstone Ranger District (T. Orr); Bighorn Sheep (T. Jones); Grizzly Bear(T. Jones).

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Preliminary Need To Change the Existing Custer and Gallatin Forest Plans

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Abstract: This document identifies preliminary needs to change management direction in the 1986 Custer Forest Plan and the 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan. It helps define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the environmental analysis related to the forest plan revision process. The need to change establishes the framework for development of plan components and other plan content, including the monitoring program.

Not all changes must be identified now. With the 2012 Planning Rule and an adaptive approach, other changes can be identified as the planning process continues. The needs identified here will undergo analysis and do not represent a final conclusion. All management direction will be examined and modified as necessary to ensure compliance with the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.

For further information, see the Custer Gallatin National Forest Web page at: www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd520802 or contact the forest plan revision team at cgplanrevision@fs.fed.us or (406) 587-6735. General Forest website: www.fs.usda.gov/custergallatin, click on Forest Plan Revision.

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Introduction

A forest plan is the overarching direction for all management decisions and projects on the Custer Gallatin National Forest, constrained by law, regulation, and policy. Two forest plans currently provide this direction to the Custer Gallatin National Forest: the 1986 Custer Forest Plan and the 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan. Both are available in hard copy at Forest Service offices in Ashland, Bozeman, Gardiner, Livingston, Red Lodge, and West Yellowstone, Montana and in Camp Crook, South Dakota. Both current plans are also available at reference desks in public libraries in Big Sky, Big Timber, Billings, Bozeman, Colstrip, Columbus, Cooke City (at the Chamber office), Ekalaka, Gardiner, Livingston, Red Lodge, and West Yellowstone, Montana and in Buffalo, South Dakota. They are also on the web at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/custergallatin/landmanagement/planning>.

The “Need to Change the Plan” identifies the need to change management direction in the existing forest plans. It helps define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the environmental analysis related to the planning process. The need to change establishes the framework for the development of plan components and other plan content, including the monitoring program.

In addition to the preliminary needs identified in this document, it is expected that other need to change items will be identified as the planning process continues. Not all changes must be identified now. The needs identified here will undergo analysis and do not represent a final conclusion. With the 2012 Planning Rule and an adaptive approach, other changes can be identified as needed. All management direction will be examined and modified as necessary to ensure its compliance with the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest prepared a forest wide assessment of the condition of fifteen ecological, social, and economic topics. A *Draft Assessment Report* and twenty five draft in depth topical reports were released for public review on November 30, 2016 and feedback was requested by January 6, 2017. A *Final Assessment Report* and final topical reports are found at: www.fs.usda.gov/detail/custergallatin/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd520802.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest released a draft preliminary Need to Change for public review on November 30, 2016 and requested feedback by January 6, 2017. In response to public feedback, several specific examples were added and clarifying language was added to some 2012 planning rule requirements, and to some of the examples.

The assessment provides a basis of information for changing the current plans. Forest staff reviewed information in the assessment when preparing the draft preliminary Need to Change. The assessment generally concluded that the current plans are functional in providing broad based direction for management yet dated in terms of strategic, integrative planning, reflecting new science, reflecting new laws and regulations, and addressing emerging topics; and the two plans do not align with each other. Little guidance is provided for some resources.

The preliminary need to change the current plans is largely related to the first four broad categories described below. Taken together, the changes related to these four categories will result in substantial changes to the current plans. Each category is described in more detail, with examples for illustration; plan changes are not limited to the examples provided. A fifth category of what is not changing is also described.

1. Create one, unified forest plan for the Custer Gallatin National Forest.
2. Address gaps in current plan direction.
3. Comply with the 2012 Planning Rule and associated directives.
4. Reflect new laws, policy, regulation, and Forest Service direction adopted since 1986.
5. Identify what is not changing.

Create a Unified Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan

The Custer National Forest and the Gallatin National Forest combined in 2014 into the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The Custer Gallatin now encompasses over 3 million acres in southern Montana and the northwest corner of South Dakota. Stretching over 400 miles from its westernmost to its easternmost boundaries, the Custer Gallatin is the most ecologically diverse national forest in the Forest Service Northern Region.

In 1986, the Custer National Forest finalized its first Land and Resource Management Plan (Custer Forest Plan) under the National Forest Management Act, with the Record of Decision signed in 1987. At that time, the Custer National Forest included, and the Forest Plan applied to, lands which are now part of the Dakota Prairie Grasslands. The Gallatin National Forest finalized its first Land and Resource Management Plan (Gallatin Forest Plan) in 1987. In the intervening 30 years, the Custer Forest Plan was amended 34 times, while the Gallatin Forest Plan was amended 50 times.

The two forest plans differ in their approach. Depending on the resource or land use, either the Gallatin Forest Plan or the Custer Forest Plan may have flexible or prescriptive management direction. Each plan has unique delineations and descriptions of management areas. A key need for changing management direction is to create one, unified forest plan.

The Custer Gallatin National Forest covers a vast landscape with dramatic differences between montane and pine savanna ecosystems, with corresponding differences in species assemblages and habitat needs. The communities near the Custer Gallatin are socially and economically diverse as well. A unified forest plan or consistent management direction does not mean every acre of the Custer Gallatin National Forest is managed the same way. It means the management approach is consistent for the entire Custer Gallatin. The following examples illustrate ways the current plans differ in their approaches and the need for consistent management direction. Plan changes are not limited to the examples provided.

- There is a need to create unified direction concerning wildland fire management. Forest plan direction for wildland fire management for the 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan was updated and amended in 2011, allowing consideration of one or more management strategies for unplanned, naturally-caused fire to achieve a variety of management objectives on all National Forest System lands within the original Gallatin National Forest administrative boundary. Forest plan direction regarding wildland fire management for the Custer Forest Plan has not been updated since 1986 and relies on specific fire management guidance for designated wilderness versus non-wilderness areas.
- There is a need to unify watershed direction from both current forest plans, including for interaction of floodplains and riparian areas. For example, the Gallatin Forest Plan has

very specific guidance for sediment delivery thresholds at various scales, while the Custer Forest Plan does not.

- There is a need to develop consistent scenery management direction. The two forest plans approach scenery management differently. The Gallatin Forest Plan applies scenery management direction according to location, while the Custer Forest Plan applies scenery management direction according to type of project. In addition, the Forest Service has developed a new Scenery Management System since the 1980s. There is a need to update scenery management direction per the new system and in the context of new roads, sites, use patterns, and settlement patterns in neighboring communities and areas.
- There is a need to address the recreation opportunity spectrum forestwide in the revised Forest Plan. The two forest plans differ on whether the recreation opportunity spectrum is included in the forest plan or the travel plan.
- There is a need for consistent direction for National Natural Landmarks. The Custer Forest Plan contains direction for two National Natural Landmarks while the Gallatin Forest Plan has no direction for the former Gallatin National Forest's National Natural Landmark.
- There is a need to remove plan language that pertains only to lands now administered by the Dakota Prairie Grasslands.

Address Gaps in Current Plan Direction

In some cases, certain resources or topics were not addressed in the current plans.

Examples include; plan changes are not limited to the examples provided:

- About 73, 000 acres have been acquired by the Forest Service since the current plans were adopted, and there is a need to provide management direction for these lands.
- There is a need to develop plan direction related to areas which are known, or suspected, to contain naturally occurring geologic hazards such as erionite, offretite, and uranium as well as known locations of mass wasting near development facilities (public and private), and to develop unified management direction. Neither current forest plan addresses these geologic hazards.
- There is a need to develop plan direction for management of areas of known unique geologic resources (designated or developed geologic areas of interest, cave and karst resources, paleontological resources, and others), and to develop unified management direction. Current forest plans lack direction for some resources in some areas. No cave and karst resources management direction was included within the Gallatin Forest Plan. No management direction was provided in either plan pertaining to other geologic resources such as designated or developed geologic areas of interest or paleontological resources.
- There is a need for direction to recognize and prevent aquatic invasive species across the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Neither current plan has direction related to aquatic invasive species.
- There is a need for direction to recognize and prevent disease (for example, white-nose syndrome in bats and white pine blister rust). The current plans have no direction related to disease.

- There is a need for plan direction for utility rights of way and communication sites to help guide decisions about expanding existing permitted sites and authorizing new sites or corridors.

2012 Planning Requirements

The current forest plans were developed under planning regulations developed in 1982. The Forest Service has learned much about forest management and forest planning in the intervening 30 years. The agency updated its planning regulations in 2012, reflecting a shift toward more strategic planning. Revised plans will focus on outcomes rather than outputs; will integrate resource management; and will contribute to ecological, economic, and social sustainability. An “all lands” approach places forest management in the context of the broader landscape. The distinctive roles and contributions of the Custer Gallatin National Forest will be identified, as will proposed and possible actions during the life of the Forest Plan. The Forest Plan will undertake adaptive management using best available science.

Much of the change associated with the revision of the current forest plans will result from the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. Requirements for what must be in forest plans include plan content and plan components. In addition, forest plans may include optional elements. Examples of new information and science needs, strategic planning needs, and the required and optional plan content is described below, with Custer Gallatin National Forest examples for each. Plan changes are not limited to the examples provided.

New Information and Science

New information and science has been developed in the 30 years since the current plans were adopted. Examples of new information and science needs to guide the revised plan include:

- There is a need to be consistent with the best available science and the most current understanding of ecosystem process and function.
- There is a need to address impacts reasonably expected to occur as a result of new information regarding climate change.
- There is a need to update the soils guidance in the revised Forest Plan. The current plans provide limited direction that does not reflect current science.
- There is a need to incorporate best available ecological and restoration concepts, such as metapopulation dynamics; headwater and prairie stream, riparian, and groundwater ecology; and invasive species.
- There is a need to provide updated management direction for the protection, maintenance, and restoration of riparian and wetland vegetation and channel morphology reflecting current science.
- There is a need to provide direction on the sustainable management of groundwater, springs, wetlands, riparian areas, and intermittent and perennial waters and their interconnections, reflecting current science.
- There is a need to incorporate multi-species and/or habitat-based plan components that are consistent with current science; for example, hiding cover and habitat security.

Strategic Planning

The structure and content of the current forest plans are often more tactical than strategic and output, rather than outcome, focused. Examples of tactical language than needs to be more strategic include:

- There is a need to replace tactical, prescriptive language of the Custer Forest Plan and the Gallatin Forest Plan with strategic language; that is, identifying land use suitability; defining desired conditions for a resource, good, or service; and identifying quantifiable objectives and project design guidelines and standards to achieve those desired conditions.
- There is a need to reconsider the overall management area scheme used in the Custer Forest Plan and the Gallatin Forest Plan. The number, arrangement, boundaries, and plan direction for the existing management areas in the current plans are challenging to apply to project-level activities.
- There is a need to manage for sustainable ecosystems and to allow adaptive responses to changing resource conditions; new science; and changing law, policy, and regulation.
- There is a need to develop strategic forest plan direction to address appropriate types and locations of outfitting and guiding on the Custer Gallatin National Forest based on current and forecasted public demand and agency and/or public need for types of services. Since development of the current plans, public needs and desires, social and environmental constraints, and agency needs have changed.
- There is a need for plan direction to guide the management of new and emerging technologies that may affect recreation opportunities and build in enough flexibility in the Forest Plan that new technologies can be addressed. Advances in technology have greatly impacted the recreation resource in the past 20 years.

Required Plan Content

Four major themes of the 2012 Rule are 1) resource integration, 2) ecological sustainability, 3) social and economic sustainability and multiple uses, with particular requirements for timber, and 4) monitoring. The management direction in the revised plan must be achievable and within the fiscal capability of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Specific planning requirements of the four themes are explored below, with examples of change needed for the Custer and Gallatin Forest Plans. The revised plan needs to fulfill requirements of the 2012 planning rule; plan changes are not limited to the examples given.

Resource Integration

The 2012 Planning Rule emphasizes ecological, social, and economic sustainability, as well as integrated resource management. The planning regulations require the revised plan to:

- provide ecological conditions to restore, establish, and maintain functioning ecosystems on National Forest System lands that can sustainably support multiple uses and provide a broad range of goods and services, considering the natural range of variation (the variation of ecological characteristics and processes over time and space);
- provide for ecological integrity, ecosystem services (benefits to people), and multiple uses in an integrated manner; and

- develop plan components that are integrated across resources.

Examples of Need to Change the Current Forest Plans for Resource Integration

- Neither plan currently approaches management from an integrated perspective, so there is a general need for direction that recognizes interconnectedness of actions.
- There is a need to incorporate integrated resource management principals and opportunities to address both potential resources conflicts (for example, recreation and wildlife) as well as complementary resource interactions (for example, fuels and scenery).
- There is a need to incorporate plan direction for the wildlife and recreation interface in densely populated and visited areas to accommodate increased recreation demand and public safety while maintaining sufficient habitat conditions to sustain healthy wildlife populations, particularly for bears, bison, and mountain lions.
- There is a need to integrate plan direction for air quality with fire, vegetation, and aquatic resources.
- There is a need to integrate coarse woody debris plan direction across resource areas to meet desired soil, wildlife, and fire management outcomes.

Ecological Sustainability

The 2012 Planning Rule emphasizes the need to restore National Forest System land and waters, including requirements to maintain and restore ecological integrity. The planning regulations require the revised plan to:

- restore, establish, and maintain functioning ecosystems that will have greater adaptive capacity to withstand stressors and recover from disturbances, especially changing and uncertain environmental conditions and extreme weather events;
- maintain ecological sustainability and connectivity to provide diversity of plant and animal habitat communities and support the persistence of native species on the Custer Gallatin National Forest;
- provide ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species that occur on the Custer Gallatin National Forest;
- identify aquatic, wildlife, invertebrate, and plant species of conservation concern and include plan components to maintain or restore ecological conditions on the Custer Gallatin National Forest to contribute to maintaining a viable population of the species within its range (species of conservation concern replace sensitive species in the current plans)
- address new stressors including the potential influences of climate change;
- integrate wildland fire, fuels management, and the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems;
- maintain or restore air quality, soils and soil productivity, water quality, and water resources, including lakes, streams, and wetlands; groundwater; public water supplies; sole-source aquifers; source water protection areas; and other sources of drinking water;

- provide widths for riparian management zones around lakes, intermittent and perennial streams and open water wetlands, giving special attention to land and vegetation about 100 feet from the edge of all perennial streams and lakes; and
- identify priority watersheds to focus efforts for maintenance or restoration. Using the national Watershed Condition Framework (WCF), national forests identify an appropriate number of priority watersheds to focus maintenance or improvement for a 5-year period.

Examples of Need to Change the Current Forest Plans for Ecological Sustainability

- There is a need to develop plan direction that emphasizes ecological restoration and management that promotes more resilient ecosystems with a greater capacity to resist stressors, such as insects, disease, and wildfire, as well as absorb and recover from disturbances.
- There is a need to consider how management guidance, emphases, and monitoring dovetail with various aspects of changing climate, including the effects on types and frequency of wildland fire and management methods to adapt to climate change dynamics. There is a need to consider climate change impacts, mitigation, and adaptation by resource area and collectively.
- There is a need for plan direction addressing the introduction and spread of non-native, invasive plant species, including direction that would minimize the spread of non-native plants that may increase as a result of management activities.
- Due to its critical ecological role and high risk of loss, there is a need to develop forest plan guidance that will help increase resistance and resilience of whitebark pine ecosystems. Within the last decade, major outbreaks of pine beetle and increasing damage and mortality from blister rust have resulted in cumulative whitebark pine losses that have altered high-elevation community composition and ecosystem processes.
- There is a need to describe desired conditions and other plan direction that varies by forest type. For example, the spatial patterning and relative distribution of structural stages, including old growth, would vary by forest type in a manner that reflects natural disturbance regimes, system dynamics, and future stressors.
- There is a need to integrate the Forest Service Northern Region's regional aquatic and riparian conservation strategy into the revised Forest Plan.
- There is a need to provide plan direction for soil productivity to achieve vegetation desired conditions.

Social and Economic Sustainability and Multiple Uses

The 2012 Planning Rule emphasizes the need to guide the Custer Gallatin National Forest contribution to social and economic sustainability to provide people and communities with a range of social, cultural, and economic benefits for present and future generations. The planning regulations require the revised plan to:

- provide for ecosystem services and multiple use, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, fish, wildlife, plants, and water resources;
- manage areas of tribal importance;
- protect cultural and historic resources;

- guide the development of mineral, nonrenewable, and renewable energy resources within the appropriate legal authorities of the Forest Service;
- address sustainable recreation, including integration of recreation settings, opportunities, and access;
- consider trails and appropriate placement and sustainable management of infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors; provide a fiscally realistic and socially, economically and ecologically sustainable desired infrastructure that can be managed in accord with other plan components, including sustainable recreation and ecological sustainability;
- provide for scenic character;
- identify existing designated areas and determine whether to recommend any additional areas;
- conduct a process to identify potential recommended wilderness areas that may be included in the revised Forest Plan;
- conduct a wild and scenic rivers eligibility study for all free-flowing, named streams on the Custer Gallatin National Forest;
- include plan components for appropriate management of designated areas or recommended designated areas;
- consider opportunities to coordinate with neighboring landowners to link open spaces and take into account joint management objectives where feasible and appropriate; and
- consider land status and ownership, use and access patterns relevant to the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

Examples of Need to Change the Current Forest Plans for Social and Economic Sustainability and Multiple Uses

- There is a need to provide plan direction for the availability and protection of treaty-reserved resources and cultural use and the sustainable management of habitats for plant and animal species important to tribes and other traditional communities.
- There is a need for plan direction reflecting the Custer Gallatin National Forest's role in supporting local economies through both commodity production, including timber, permitted grazing, and other multiple-uses, and the service-based economy that includes recreation and tourism.
- There is a need for plan direction for management and accommodation of the removal of miscellaneous products for commercial, noncommercial, and tribal use, such as plants (used for food, fuel, medicine, or crafts), tipi poles, or other materials.
- There is a need to update plan direction reflecting the Custer Gallatin National Forest's role in meeting the range of public recreation demands considering the social, environmental, fiscal, and regional context. The existing plans do not currently set clear criteria for managers to evaluate emerging/existing uses or provide a framework for guiding sustainable recreation opportunities across and within specific areas of the Forest.
- There is a need for plan direction for permitted livestock grazing that allows adaptive management toward ecosystem-based desired conditions, within site capability, and with

particular emphasis on management in areas of concentrated use (that is, riparian, wetlands, and green ash draws) and when addressing drought or post-wildfire recovery.

- Unified minerals and energy management guidance is needed, within Forest Service authority, for locatable minerals (hardrock and placer), leasable minerals (conventional oils and gas, and coalbed methane), mineral material resources, personal use collection for material such as landscaping cobbles and petrified wood, renewable energy resources and related transmission corridors, and for existing and potential Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act sites related to past mineral and energy production activities.
- There is a need to update plan direction to address multiple demands for the existing and projected water supply in a sustainable manner. There is a need to incorporate wilderness plan direction as appropriate at the forest plan level per National policy and wilderness performance elements to meet requirements of the law (natural processes, integrity, solitude, etc.).
- There is a need to incorporate direction for management of 12 designated national recreation trails, the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and the historic Nez Perce Trail and Bannock Trail.
- There is a need to determine appropriate national recreation trails for recommendation to the Regional Forester for possible designation. The Gallatin Forest Plan proposed the evaluation of some trails for potential national recreation trail designation but a comprehensive evaluation has not been completed. Some of the trails identified in the early 1990s may not best represent the intent of the national recreation trail program while others across the Custer Gallatin National Forest may be more appropriate for inclusion based on their use and condition as well as their relative importance to the public.
- There is a need to remove Deer Draw and White Rocks Springs as candidate research natural areas. The Deer Draw area does not meet the required pristine conditions for a research natural area and another research natural area represents similar habitat. No records can be found for the White Rocks Springs area and 19 other research natural areas in the Northern Region represent similar habitat.
- There is a need to update plan direction for existing, candidate, and any future research natural areas.
- There is a need to update current forest plan criteria for land adjustments. Existing criteria have served the lands program well and there is a need to continue land adjustment criteria in the new plan; with modification as needed.

Timber and Forest Vegetation Resources

The 2012 Planning Rule has detailed guidance for timber harvest. The Rule recognizes timber harvest occurs for many different reasons, including ecological restoration, community protection in wildland-urban interfaces, habitat restoration, protection of municipal water supplies, and to contribute to economic sustainability through the production of wood products. Timber harvest, whether for wood production, restoration, or other reasons, can support local businesses and employment. To guide harvest activities, the 2012 Planning Rule requires the new Forest Plan to:

- identify lands that are suited and not suited for timber production based on established criteria;
- develop plan components to guide harvest on suitable lands;
- establish specific, permissible reasons and appropriate plan components to guide the use of timber harvest as a tool in order to protect other multiple use values on lands not suited for timber production;
- calculate (1) the sustained yield limit (the amount of timber that can be harvested from the forest annually in perpetuity on a sustained-yield basis); (2) the projected timber sale quantity (the estimated quantity of timber expected to be sold during the plan period); and (3) the projected wood sale quantity (the estimated quantity of timber and all other wood products expected to be sold from the plan area for the plan period); and
- establish limits on maximum size of created openings based on the natural range of variability.

Example of Need to Change the Current Forest Plans for Timber Harvest

- There is a need to identify lands as suitable for timber production as defined in the 2012 Planning Rule and per the desired conditions of the revised Forest Plan.

Monitoring

The 2012 Planning Rule requires a sustainable plan monitoring program. The program identifies a set of monitoring questions to evaluate whether plan components are effective and appropriate and whether management is effective in maintaining or achieving progress towards desired conditions and objectives. The revised plan needs to contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators, based on the best available science.

The monitoring plan must identify potential plant and/or animal focal species or other monitoring measures to indicate the health of ecosystems and their components (coarse filter) or specific habitats (fine filter) as needed. Focal species replace management indicator species from the 1982 planning regulations.

Examples of Need to Change the Current Forest Plans for Monitoring

- There is a need for an updated, cost-effective, adaptable monitoring strategy, reflecting current techniques and ecological principles.
- There is a need to identify air quality related values that could be used as indicators in air quality monitoring. Examples of indicators currently monitored in an interagency effort include lichens, high alpine lakes, visibility, precipitation, and snowpack.

Required Plan Components

Plan components are the core elements of plans. The required plan content described above is carried out through the plan components. All projects and activities should be consistent with plan components. Required plan components include desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, suitability of lands, and identifying where plan components apply. Plan components will be within Forest Service authority, the inherent capability of the plan area, and the fiscal capability of the Custer Gallatin National Forest. The set of plan components

must meet the requirements set forth for sustainability, plant and animal diversity, multiple use and timber, etc. described in the required plan content.

Desired Conditions

Desired conditions are a change from the current plans. A desired condition is a description of specific social, economic, and/or ecological characteristics of the plan area, or a portion of the plan area, toward which management of the land and resources should be directed. Desired conditions must be described in terms that are specific enough to allow progress toward their achievement to be determined but not include completion dates. Desired conditions are not commitments or final decisions approving projects and activities. For some resources, the desired condition may currently exist. For other resources, desired conditions may only be achievable over a long period. Desired conditions describe the vision of what the Forest should look like in the future. Desired conditions drive the development of other plan components such as standards, guidelines and suitability. The other plan components guide how to get to the desired conditions.

Example

The current Forest Plans do not contain desired conditions. A possible desired condition for vegetation might be

“Newly invading, non-native invasive plant species are treated and populations are contained or eradicated. The weed program uses integrated pest management approaches, including prevention and control measures that limit introduction, intensification, and spread due to management activities.”

Objectives

An objective is a concise, measurable, and time-specific statement of a desired rate of progress toward a desired condition or conditions. Objectives describe the focus of management within the plan period, considered to be over the first 15 years of plan implementation, unless otherwise specified. Objectives should be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.

Example

An example objective might be “Treat 10,000 acres of weeds in ten years.”

Standards

A standard is a mandatory constraint on project and activity decision-making, established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet legal requirements.

Example

An example standard might be “All revegetation projects shall require weed-free seed.”

Guidelines

A guideline is a constraint on project and activity decision-making that allows departure from its terms, so long as the purpose of the guideline is met. Guidelines are established to help

achieve or maintain a desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet legal requirements.

Example

An example guideline might be “Non-native invasive plant treatments in riparian areas should utilize mechanical, biological and cultural methods before chemical control methods.”

Suitability of Lands

Specific lands within a plan area will be identified as suitable for various multiple uses or activities based on the desired conditions applicable to those lands. The plan will also identify lands within the plan area as not suitable for uses that are not compatible with desired conditions for those lands. The suitability of lands need not be identified for every use or activity. Suitability identifications may be made after consideration of historic uses and of issues that have arisen in the planning process. Every plan must identify those lands that are not suitable for timber production.

Identify Where Plan Components Apply

The plan must indicate which plan components apply forestwide, which apply to specific parcels of land, and which apply to land of specific character. Every plan must have management areas (MAs) or geographic areas (GAs) or both. Plans use management areas or geographic areas to apply plan components to specific mapped parcels of land. Geographic areas are based on place; management areas are based on purpose. For example, a distinct mountain range could be a geographic area (such as the Pryor Mountains). Research Natural Areas could be a management area; they are established for a particular purpose.

Some plan components may apply to land of specific character; for example, riparian areas, roads, springs, streams, and wetlands.

Optional Plan Components and Content

In addition to the required plan elements described above, the revised Forest Plan may include the optional content described below.

Optional Plan Component: Goals

Goals are broad statements of intent, other than desired conditions, usually related to process or interaction with the public. Goals are expressed in broad, general terms but do not include completion dates.

Optional Plan Content

Plans may include optional content, such as potential management approaches or strategies and partnership opportunities or coordination activities, existing conditions, explanatory narrative, general management principles, management approaches, management challenges, performance history, performance risks, or referenced material. Optional content must not include, or appear to include, a “to do” list of tasks or actions.

Management approaches would describe the principal strategies and program priorities the Custer Gallatin National Forest intends to use to carry out projects and activities developed under the plan. The management approaches can convey a sense of priority and focus among objectives and the likely management emphasis. Management approaches should relate to desired conditions and may indicate the future course or direction of change, recognizing budget trends, program demands, and accomplishments. Management approaches may discuss potential processes such as analysis, assessment, inventory, project planning, or monitoring.

Land management plans may reference other sources of information in “other plan content” such as standard road and trail construction clauses, special use authorization clauses, memoranda of understanding between the Forest Service and other agencies, Congressional direction, or best management practice guidebooks. Optional plan content can be changed through administrative changes.

Reflect New Law, Policy, Regulation, or Forest Service Direction that have been Adopted Since 1986

In addition to the new Forest Service planning regulations, multiple laws, executive orders, and Forest Service direction have been implemented or changed since 1986. The Custer Gallatin National Forest has applied new law and regulations over the years even if the language is not in the current plans. The revised Forest Plan language will need to reflect these new requirements. The revised plan can remove components redundant with existing policy, direction, and programmatic planning documents and incorporate this direction by specific reference only, making the revised plan more adaptable to changing laws and policies. Some examples of new requirements include:

- Numerous new regulations and laws relate to the management of tribal relations and cultural resource issues, including the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990; the National Historic Preservation Act as amended in 1992; the 1996 Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites; and Title VIII, Subtitle B of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.
 - ◆ Per the National Historic Preservation Act as amended in 1992, there is a need for plan direction to address the management and protection of traditional cultural properties, historic landscapes, and historic sites and districts.
 - ◆ Per 1996 Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites, there is a need for plan direction to address management, use, and protection of sacred sites and lands identified by the Tribes.
- There is a need to address the change in status for federally listed species over time; for example, some species listed when the original plans were implemented have since been de-listed, while new species have been added to the list of threatened and endangered species.
- There is a need to update plan direction for management of unauthorized, human-caused fire in accordance with the Federal wildland fire management policy (USFS/USDI 2009) and amendments. There is a need to update plan direction for unplanned and

planned (management-ignited) fire within designated wilderness areas in accordance with fire and fuel management guidelines outlined in the Forest Service Manual 2324.

- There is a need for plan direction to be consistent with conservation strategies, such as those for grizzly bear and lynx.
- There is a need to incorporate Forest Service Northern Region soils management requirements.
- There is a need for plan direction for managing the Beartooth Highway National Scenic Byways All-American Road consistent with the comprehensive management plan.

What is Not Changing

Some things will not be addressed in the revised plan. While a forest plan can set management direction for designated areas, it cannot change the boundaries or purposes of areas designated by Congress or areas subject to rule making. In addition, a forest plan sets broad direction; it does not make site-specific decisions. Examples of topics that will not change in the revised Forest Plan are:

- Site-specific travel decisions. A forest plan does not make site-specific travel planning designations such as selection of roads, trails and areas where motorized or mechanized vehicle travel will be allowed, restricted, or prohibited. Depending on the direction it sets, for example changes to recommended wilderness, the revised Forest Plan may set context for future travel planning efforts.
- Existing wilderness boundaries (Lee Metcalf and Absaroka Beartooth Wilderness) were established and defined by Congress and cannot be modified in a forest plan revision effort.
- The Hyalite Porcupine Wilderness Study Area boundary was established by Congress and cannot be modified in a forest plan revision effort.
- The Cabin Creek Wildlife and Recreation Management Area boundary was established by Congress and cannot be modified in a forest plan revision effort.
- The Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act was enacted December 15, 1971. Wild horses can only be managed on areas of National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management lands where they were known to exist in 1971, at the time of the passage of the Act. For the Forest Service, these areas are known as “territories” and for the Bureau of Land Management, they are known as “herd areas”. Under section 1339 “Limitation of Authority”, the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971 states *“Nothing in this Act shall be construed to authorize the Secretary to relocate wild free-roaming horses or burros to areas of the public lands where they do not presently exist”*. Until a change in the law allows expansion of the Pryor Mountain wild horse range onto additional National Forest System or Bureau of Land Management lands outside of the existing territory and herd area, the agencies have a legal obligation to follow the law to the greatest extent possible.
- National scenic trails and national heritage roads designations cannot be modified in forest plan revision.
- The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) establishes prohibitions and permissions on road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting on

58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands. The Roadless Rule can only be modified through a subsequent rulemaking process by the Department of Agriculture or by legislation from Congress

- The areas to which grizzly bear plan direction apply will not change, even though the nomenclature may change relative to the species' federal status. The term "recovery zone" applies to the area emphasized while the grizzly bear is listed under the Endangered Species Act. The term will change to "primary conservation area" if the grizzly bear is removed from the list of threatened species (that is, de-listed).
- A total of 80 sites were identified as withdrawn from mineral entry under the General Mining Act as amended in the 1986 Custer Forest Plan (Appendix IV) and the 1987 Gallatin Forest Plan (Appendix D). During the plan revision process, the Custer Gallatin National Forest will not undertake a determination of which of these sites should be considered for future withdrawal continuation, withdrawal modification, or withdrawal revocation. Such determinations would be made as a future work item after this planning effort.
- The plan revision effort will not undertake new oil and gas leasing decisions. Oil and gas leasing decisions require a detailed level of analysis that is difficult to combine with the programmatic level analysis conducted for a forest plan.
- Sixty eight suspended oil and gas leases cover about 100,000 acres within the Custer Gallatin National Forest. Due to a court decision, no activity may take place on the leases until an environmental impact statement is completed. The plan revision effort will not undertake analysis related to these 68 leases; such decisions require a detailed level of analysis that is difficult to combine with the programmatic level analysis conducted for a forest plan.
- Changing the current configuration of the Custer Gallatin National Forest is beyond the scope of forest plan revision; for instance, which Ranger Districts are part of the Forest.