

Hello from the Bighorn National Forest. In 2005, I wrote to you about the completion of the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) and how we looked forward to working with you, the people who enjoy and care for the Bighorn National Forest. The staff and I want to thank you for your partnerships, collaboration, and service. Those of us who work for the Forest Service are privileged to manage the Forest with you as we work to strike a balance between the recreation, timber, forage, and water uses that benefit us all and the resource protection that allows us to conserve these benefits for future generations. This publication is about reflecting back on 12 years of forest plan implementation accomplishments as well as what has changed, what did not go as expected, and what could be expected in the future. In this report, I will highlight key accomplishments implemented under each of the four forest plan goals.

We look forward to another successful 10 years of forest plan implementation and continuation of positive engagement with the public and agencies whose partnerships and volunteerism alongside our employees have allowed for these accomplishments to overshadow increasing challenges.

Sincerely,

*Bill Bass*

## *Ensure sustainable ecosystems*

### Improved watershed conditions through monitoring and implementation of best management practices

- Watershed restoration projects to improve water quality and vegetation
  - Riparian fence installed along North Fork Crazy Woman Creek
  - Adjustment of livestock grazing practices and provision/maintenance of 24 exclosures in at-risk riparian areas
  - Watershed conditions improved on timber and fuels projects including Bald Mountain Salvage, Bench, Cold Springs, Riley Point, Woodchuck, Crater Ridge, Woodrock, Babione, Swamp, Garland Salvage, Dullknife, and West Tensleep



Figure 3. Restoring wetland and stream habitat on the South Tongue River.

# FOREST PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT

## Trail system stewardship

- Forest conducted over 180 miles of trail maintenance annually
- Grants received from Wyoming State trails to perform heavy maintenance and reroutes

## Dispersed camping management

- West Tensleep Corridor Project
  - In cooperation with volunteers, conducted bareground assessments of vegetation damage, campfires, soil impacts, human waste, and littering
  - Closed heavily impacted campsites and opened others away from sensitive riparian areas along West Tensleep Creek
  - Provided education and enforcement of regulations...created additional opportunities for dispersed camping in less sensitive and underused locations

## Restored habitat

- Yellowstone cutthroat trout reintroduced with non-native fish removed and aquatic organism passages installed in Dry Medicine Lodge, Buckskin Ed, and Soldier Creeks and Little Tongue River
- Cost-share partnership with Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to improve elk habitat
- 1,269 acres of aspen habitat restored

## Healthy forests

- West Tensleep Fuels Project reduced heavy fuels along forest roads and reduced potential for fire spread in area with heavy recreation use
- Bench Stewardship Contract in Shell Canyon treated 852 acres for bark beetle
- Gypsy moth trapping and pheromone treatments for bark beetle at Shell Falls
- Noxious weed treatments applications on 360 to 2,691 acres per year

## Multiple benefits to people

### Capital improvement project grants

- Reconstructed seven campgrounds, two trailheads/kiosks, and six day use areas with over \$6 million in competitive funding

### Medicine Wheel/Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark

- In 2011, successfully completed updated landmark designation with a 4,080-acre boundary incorporating Native American ethnographic and archaeological data
- Hosted Native American ceremonies and over 10,000 visitors annually
- 2016 was the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of implementation of the Medicine Wheel Historic Preservation Plan with seven consulting parties



Figure 2. Before and after conditions with grazing management practices adjusted at Big Willow Creek.

# FOREST PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT

## Improvements in public safety through WYDOT partnerships

- Burgess Junction South Highway Project
  - Widening of highway
  - Installation of runaway truck ramps
  - County Line West highway project - removed hazardous rock fall, widened highway

## Cooperation with range permittees

- Supported continued grazing while restoring upland and riparian vegetation

## Forest products

- Attained 81% of target for total volume of commercial timber production

## *Scientific and technical assistance*

### Stewardship of Cloud Peak Wilderness

- Background Campsite Assessments by volunteers on more than 350 campsites

### Partnerships and grants with Wyoming Natural Diversity Database

- Surveyed bats and water voles and discovered several new plant species

### 17 years of working with the Steering Committee to provide input on the forest plan

- State of Wyoming Governor's Office and State agencies, County Commissioners and Conservation District Supervisors
- Instrumental in the development and implementation of the Forest Plan
- Engagement with Governor's State Task Force on Forests has identified collaborative groups to work on a roadless rule policy proposal, municipal watershed protection, and recreation management.

## *Effective public service*

### Completion of three travel management plans

- Woodrock, Clear Creek/Crazy Woman, and Hunt Mountain

### Motorized Recreation Education Program in partnership with Wyoming State Trails

- Contacts with over 12,000 OHV users and 2,000 snowmobilers annually providing directions, Tread Lightly information, and maps
- Safety and emergency patrols and clearing of roads and trails
- WY State trails sticker compliance is over 99% annually
- Annual publication of motor vehicle use map

### Maintenance and reconstruction of roads and facilities

- 1,439 miles of roads maintained/reconstructed and decommissioning of 4-6 miles of high risk/low value road annually
- \$702,000 in deferred maintenance of facilities and structures

### Partnerships with communities for Fire Management

- Dullknife, Clear Creek, West Tensleep Creek, Babione, Spear-O-Wigwam, Canyon Creek Estates projects thinned forests in and near lodges, summer homes, and communities along the forest boundary
- Active in partnership with state and local fire management resources, in both fuel reduction projects and incident management
- Wyoming State Helitack Program, Firewise communities, and education for cabin owners

# FOREST PLAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT

## Bighorn Resource Advisory Committee

- Coordinated membership, approved recommendations, and provided funding and implementation of trails, facilities, and invasive species/weeds projects

## *Notable changes*

### Roadless Area Conservation Rule

- Required to request exemptions to cut or haul timber within the designated suitable timber base contained within the roadless area boundary

### Wildland Urban Interface

- Increased hazardous fuels reductions through Wildland Urban Interface treatment projects

### Governor's Task Force on Forests and Governor's Task Force on Recreation

- State is taking leadership in convening collaborative opportunities (i.e., Buffalo Municipal Watershed Project, Roadless Collaborative) with support from Forest Resources

### Technology

- Interactive trails map
- WIFI availability at lodges/resorts
- Side-by-side OHVs

## *Unexpected events*

### Antelope Butte

- Closed and proposal submitted by nonprofit to reopen is gaining traction/funding

### Forest health

- Avoided major insect and disease epidemic, primarily through natural factors, and remain a distinct green national forest in Wyoming

### Closing of Burgess Visitor Center

## *Challenges over the next 10 years*

### Budgets

- Workforce/workload balance to meet stewardship/public service needs
- Responding to visitor recreation use issues, needs, and opportunities

### Recreation

- Utilizing new technology to provide information on recreation opportunities
- Managing for sustainable dispersed camping opportunities
- Increasing partnership and volunteer opportunities to meet increasing recreation use
- Rock climbing carrying capacity and Climbing Management Plan