



Aquatic and Riparian Conservation

Inyo National Forest

Frequently Asked Questions

Has the Inyo National Forest's plan direction changed for aquatic and riparian resources?

Yes. We revised the Inyo National Forest's plan direction for aquatic and riparian resources in response to public comments we received on the [draft forest plan](#) (published May 2016). We heard the aquatic management strategy and plan components from the 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment were difficult to find in the Inyo's draft plan. The public also questioned the number of Critical Aquatic Refuges as well as their locations. In addition, we received comments regarding suggested additions, subtractions and modification to plan components, including standards and guidelines.

How has plan direction changed?

We reorganized the draft so plan direction related to water, watersheds and aquatic and riparian resources is together, and we introduced an Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy. Additionally, we cross-referenced related topics like rangeland and animal and plant species. We described conservation watersheds as part of the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy. Also, we added an appendix outlining our approach to aquatic and riparian resources conservation, and how we prioritize restoration. Some plan components were modified to address suggested additions, subtractions and modifications made by the public.

What is the Aquatic and Riparian Conservation Strategy?

The goal of the Strategy is to develop a network of properly functioning watersheds that support aquatic and riparian species and high quality water. The Strategy includes: analysis, monitoring, land allocations (i.e., riparian conservation areas, conservation watersheds, priority watersheds) and watershed restoration. These elements work together to achieve desired conditions across the planning area. Plan components (direction) apply to the management of land allocations and watershed restoration, while other parts of the strategy (e.g., analysis, monitoring, and priority watersheds) are described in other plan content.

What happened to Critical Aquatic Refuges (CARs)?

Considering public comments, best available science, relevant approaches on other forests, and other species-specific conservation measures, we are adding an alternative in the final EIS that replaces CARs with conservation watersheds. Conservation watersheds are intended to be a network of watersheds in good condition that serve as a stronghold for at-risk species and other biodiversity as well as sources of high quality water. Several CARs were incorporated within conservation watersheds.

Will at-risk species associated with Critical Aquatic Refuges still benefit from conservation measures?

Even though CARs are no longer included in the proposed Inyo National Forest plan, we will manage for at-risk species either through plan direction or through policy, law and regulations, including species conservation and recovery plans. Conservation watersheds benefit species found in them, providing better resilience and habitat connectivity in the face of large-scale disturbance.

What are the differences between Critical Aquatic Refuges and Conservation Watersheds?

CARs sought to protect remnant species populations, and while important, our goal was to ensure species persistence, which could best be accomplished by ensuring habitat resiliency in the face of large-scale unpredictable events. Conservation watersheds provide well distributed refugia for more species, and also create suitable ecological conditions across larger landscapes. While CARs focused on localized areas of at-risk species habitat, many of these species required conditions dependent upon the availability of high quality water. Conservation watersheds seek to protect water sources for at-risk species and for other beneficial uses, including, but not limited to, suitable habitat for water species, swimming, and drinking (after normal treatment). Restoration goals were not explicit in CARs but they are explicit in conservation watersheds. Additionally, developing a network of refugia among sub-basins and connectivity is a goal in the design of conservation watersheds.

What is the difference between Conservation Watersheds and Priority Watersheds?

Conservation watersheds emphasize long-term prioritization for maintenance and restoration to promote resilient watersheds that will benefit aquatic and riparian resources. In conservation watersheds, achieving desired conditions could take more than one planning cycle.

Priority watersheds are a short-term, geographically focused approach to restore all habitat types. Priority watersheds utilize restoration projects that could be completed within a 5-7 year period. Once completed, the Forest may shift restoration efforts to a new priority watershed. Priority watersheds may be designated within conservation watersheds to maintain or improve conditions.

Are there plan components for Conservation Watersheds?

Yes. You may review supporting materials, including maps and the plan components associated with conservation watersheds, on-line: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r5/FPRPreview.

How did public comment shape the updated plan direction?

Public comment highlighted ambiguity in plan direction related to aquatic and riparian resources. In response, we shifted to an Aquatic and Riparian Strategy that uses a conservation watershed approach. Additionally, public comments offered additional best available scientific information. For example, we acquired additional datasets from peer-reviewed literature to identify high value freshwater conservation areas. Public comments also informed the plan monitoring program, and helped us refine plan components such as standards and guidelines.

Where can I find more information about aquatic and riparian plan direction?

You may review supporting materials, including the plan components associated with the aquatic and riparian direction, on-line: www.fs.usda.gov/goto/r5/FPRPreview. If you have questions, please contact Deb Schweizer, Inyo National Forest Public Affairs Officer at 760-873-2427.

Why is the Forest Service sharing this plan direction? Is this a comment period?

This is not a formal comment period. We are sharing information about the aquatic and riparian plan direction and other topics to provide you a preview of the Inyo National Forest's land management plan. These previews provide a glimpse into plan development as it is happening. This process is information sharing, and we are not receiving formal comments at this time. The completed, final EIS and forest plan will be available for a 60-day objection period this fall.

When will the Inyo National Forest's final environmental impact statement and forest plan be released?

Our goal is to publish these documents this fall. Between now and then, we will continue to provide updates on our progress. We are also sharing information about the Inyo National Forest's plan direction for sustainable recreation, wild and scenic rivers and species of conservation concern.

What is the status of the Sequoia and Sierra National Forests' plans?

As we announced in March 2017, the Sequoia and Sierra National Forests will continue to address public comments in a refinement of the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) and draft forest plans [published](#) in May 2016. Those forests will release a revised draft EIS and forest plans in early 2018 for public comment. In the coming months, we will share updates on our progress with these two forests as well.

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