

**USDA Forest Service**  
**National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land**  
**Management Planning Rule Meeting**  
**January 30 – February 1, 2018**  
**USFS International Programs, 1 Thomas Circle, Suite 400, Washington, D.C.**

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## **Introduction**

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (the Committee) held its fifth and final meeting of the third charter from January 30 – February 1, 2018 in Washington, D.C.

## **Objectives**

Discuss, finalize and submit final recommendations; discuss with Forest Service leadership the Committee's impact on agency thinking, and the agency's vision for future collaborative efforts; and celebrate Committee accomplishments and service.

## **Attendees**

- Committee members present: Mike Anderson, William Barquin, Susan Jane Brown, Robert Cope, Adam Cramer, Daniel Dessecker, Angelou Ezeilo, James Magagna, Joan May, Martin Nie, Megan Sutton, Peter Nelson, Michelle Nuttall, Candice Price, Angela Sondenaa, Ray Vaughan, Lindsay Warness
- Substitutes present: Karen Hardigg
- Committee members absent: Valerie Huerta, Russ Ehnes, Thomas Troxel, Gabriel Vasquez
- Substitutes absent: Caitlyn Pollihan
- Forest Service/USDA: Chris French – Designated Federal Official, Associate Deputy Chief; Tony Tooke, Chief of the Forest Service; Lenise Lago, Acting Associate Chief; Leslie Weldon, Deputy Chief; WO EMC Staff: Andrea Bedell-Loucks, Maia Enzer, Shasta Ferranto, Crystal Merica, John Rupe, Priya Shahani; Regional Planning Directors: Mark Bethke, Tony Erba, Peter Gaulke, Dave Hayes, Mary Beth Hennessey, Al Olson, Julia Riber, Jennifer Ruyle, Julie Shaeffers, Jenna Sloan, Emily Wagner, Deb Whitall; USDA: Kathryn Toffenetti
- Facilitation Team present: Kathleen Rutherford, Pam Motley
- Public present: Vera Smith, Wilderness Society; Meryl Harrell

## **Actions and Agreements**

1. ***The Committee finalized a suite of recommendations to be conveyed to the USDA Secretary and the Chief of the Forest Service which focus specifically on Shared Stewardship, Youth Engagement, Planning for Success, Species of Conservation Concern, Monitoring, Objections and the Path Forward.***

## **Meeting Summary**

### **Welcome & Opening Remarks**

Chris French, Forest Service Designated Federal Official (DFO), welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked Committee members for their service. He noted that this is a dynamic time and the agency is continuing to learn and evolve in support of a stable planning environment. Across the country, forests continue to finalize land management plan revisions. Jim Magagna and Joan May, Committee Co-Chairs, welcomed the Committee and thanked everyone for their hard work on developing the draft recommendations. They noted that, as the agency faces tighter budgets, land management plans will become more significant. In the past, a large portion of the analysis was completed at the project level. Now, plans will need to carry more analysis to allow for more efficient project implementation.

### **Process Overview – Developing Final Consensus Recommendations**

The Committee spent the last year carefully reviewing, learning and identifying key areas on which to focus. The Committee employed the following step-wise approach to reach consensus. First, working groups were created for key topics and tasked with generating relevant context and draft recommendations.<sup>1</sup> Second, working group consensus recommendations were aggregated into the first draft document and shared with the Committee as a whole for review and comment. Working group co-chairs reviewed Committee input; Committee and working group co-chairs also held a conference call to discuss the feedback received. Revisions were then made based on committee comments, generating the second draft recommendation document that was circulated to the Committee, and which included a more-narrow list of unresolved issues that were “still in play”. Next, the facilitation team invited every member to individual check in calls to discuss the second draft recommendations. Each member was invited to identify their top three priority recommendations. Finally, the Committee used this last meeting to resolve ‘in play’ and other priority recommendations. Only those recommendations that garnered full consensus (unanimous support) are included in the final recommendation document.

### **Discussion – Finalizing Committee Recommendations**

The Committee focused their review and discussion on the portions of the draft recommendations that were still ‘in play’. Key areas of discussion that led to revisions included:

- Overall Observations on Implementation –
  - The Committee discussed the need to balance vocalizing concerns with how forests are implementing the Rule with also acknowledging the space that planners need to learn. The Rule presents a sea change for the agency. The Committee agreed to use a future focus. While recognizing that the agency has the Rule, Directives and additional guidance, members also discussed the need to facilitate cultural change within the agency in order to increase the efficiency and efficacy with which the Rule is implemented moving forward.
- Shared Stewardship –
  - The introduction section was revised to emphasize the number of existing supporting policies, programs, and authorities that enable shared stewardship.
  - Balance and parity – Several members shared concerns about calling out a particular use or interest over another. The Committee agreed to seek parity and avoid language that could be construed as advocacy. When citing a particular stakeholder group, the recommendations seek to recognize individual contributions without valuing them above others. The ‘Engaging User Groups to Add Capacity’ section was revised to address this.
  - The ‘Respecting Tribal, Indigenous, and Traditional Communities’ Wisdom and Stewardship’ section was revised to acknowledge the unique role that tribal, indigenous, and traditional communities play.
  - Authority and Decision-Making – The Committee discussed the importance of respecting the agency’s and other stakeholders’ decision-making authority and legal obligations and the need for clear language to avoid any confusion or misinterpretation that would lead to unintended consequences. The ‘Cross Boundary Planning and Management’ and ‘Intergovernmental Cooperation on Fish and Wildlife Plan Direction’ sections were revised to address this.
  - The ‘Cohesive Wildland Fire Strategy’ was revised to acknowledge opportunities for 1) partners to assist with wildland fire objectives beyond fuels reductions and 2) economic efficiencies through partnerships – without calling out a particular industry or use.

- A new recommendation was added to the 'Engaging User Groups to Add Capacity' section to recommend that the Forest Service work with its partners to develop new analytical tools to enable a spatially oriented and geographically relevant approach to planning.
- Youth Engagement –
  - The 'Employee Training' section was revised to clarify that employees already interested in and skilled at youth engagement should be placed in youth engagement positions.
  - A new recommendation was added to address the need to place new interns and employees from diverse backgrounds in work environments that nurture their development and that the agency should continue to address unconscious bias.
- Species of Conservation Concern (SCC) –
  - SCC Objections Process – The DFO described the challenges associated with the SCC process including sequencing, timeline, and complexities associated with having forest, regional and national-level involvement. The Committee discussed the benefits and limitations (including unintended consequences) of creating an SCC-specific objections process at the beginning of the revision process that would allow stakeholders to object to the SCC list. Committee concerns included: elevating one component of the planning process over other issues (e.g. wilderness, timber); creating a disadvantage for stakeholders by requiring them to object to the SCC list early in the planning process prior to seeing how species will be addressed in the plan; potentially precluding objections to SCCs once the draft plan is released; the mechanics of having a public objections process for an administrative decision; and inflaming existing public perceptions that ecological factors are given undue weight in the planning process. The Committee did not reach consensus on recommending an SCC-specific objections process but agreed to describe the challenges and complexities of the current SCC process in the problem/opportunity statement within the overarching SCC recommendations.
  - The 'Stakeholder Engagement at the Plan Level' section was revised to remove comparison between the SCC and Wilderness processes.
  - The 'Leveraging Outside Expertise' section was revised to recommend that forests should engage external subject matter experts in helping to collect and analyze the necessary data through a neutral and transparent scientific process as part of a team effort to conserve species.
- Monitoring –
  - The 'Incorporate Social and Economic Monitoring' section was revised to recommend that forests work with external experts, economists, and social scientists and stakeholders, ranging from businesses to non-profit governmental organizations, who have data resources.
  - The 'Broad Scale Monitoring' section was revised to recommend that both broad scale and forest specific monitoring be identified and included in forest and grasslands monitoring plans and biennial reports.
  - The 'Development and Use of Biennial Monitoring Reports' section was revised to recommend that forests develop an executive summary of monitoring results with descriptive graphics to quickly convey key conclusions to forest service management and the general public.
- Planning for Success –

- The ‘Desired Conditions and Objectives’ section was revised to add an example of a good objective.
- The Committee discussed that while forests should consider a range of factors to achieve an appropriate balance among plan components, including controversy (including opposition or support for a use), it is also vital that all plan components are consistent with the corresponding definition from the Rule, i.e. their development is not based on public interests alone. To address this, the recommendation on balancing plan components was moved and placed right after the recommendation that plan components must be consistent with the Rule.
- Objections –
  - One member expressed concern over recommending that the agency undertake rule-making to change the 218 and/or HFRA processes because they are outside of this Committee’s purview. To address this, the recommendation was revised to allow the agency to determine the best way to align the multiple processes.
  - The recommendation was also revised to clarify that the objections timeframes (not public comment period) should be aligned.
- Path Forward –
  - The section was revised to recommend that the agency establish an agency-led National Oversight Committee and that for maximum efficiency, the agency should consider pulling people from the sunset FACA Committee and include other experts on planning as needed.
  - To increase the clarity of the recommendation, the options for non-agency-led working groups were removed.
- Structure and Formatting –
  - The co-chairs will draft a cover letter to the Chief summarizing the recommendations.
  - Order of the chapters: Shared Stewardship, Youth Engagement, Planning for Success, Species of Conservation Concern, Monitoring, Objections, and Path Forward.
  - Format: The examples will be placed in the text, smaller font will be used for examples, the chapters will be numbered.
  - The facilitation team will perform copy editing on the document.

### **Discussion with Leadership – Path Forward**

Lenise Lago, Acting Associate Chief, and Leslie Weldon, Deputy Chief, joined the Committee for a discussion on the impact the Committee has had on agency thinking and their vision for future collaborative efforts. The Forest Service appreciates the Committee’s work and members’ ability to come together across the spectrum to dialogue and develop consensus recommendations. In particular, the Committee’s recommendations on turnover and transition are being put into practice. The Handover memo is an effective way to facilitate a smooth transition--leadership is working to elevate this so that it becomes regular procedure. The Chief has prioritized customer service and shared stewardship. Leadership is working to ensure better alignment between the Washington Office and the field around these priorities. The agency recognizes that line officers need to engage partners and employees in an open and transparent manner, build community, and invite partners to help develop solutions and opportunities. Like any cultural shift, this change will take time but it will lead to greater resiliency and stronger relationships. Finally, they noted that leadership believes that Committee members will continue to be of value to the agency after the charter expires.

Committee members encouraged the agency to continue to provide public engagement training (i.e. soft skills) and to emphasize shared stewardship in planning and management. With limited capacity and budgets, partners can work with the agency to help achieve desired conditions. Additional Committee observations included: the human element is key – without meaningful relationships, people won't understand the importance of our forests; it is important to engage youth early and often to cultivate the next generation of land stewards; the Forest Service needs to become an integral part of the community; there is a real value in bringing people with diverse voices together; it is hard to overstate the value of making people feel that they have been heard – this doesn't mean you have to do what they want but people want to feel that they have been listened to.

### **Discussion with Regional Planning Directors**

The Regional Planning Directors (RPD) joined the Committee to discuss challenges and opportunities with implementation of the 2012 Rule.<sup>1</sup> RPDs identified the following challenges: limited capacity and funding, shifting agency priorities, staff turnover and retirements giving rise to a dearth of institutional knowledge and expertise, and the amount of learning and change that the 2012 Rule requires. Several RPDs noted that stressful times and limited capacity also give rise to innovation. The pace and scale of planning is increasing, and the agency is trying new things they would never have thought of a few years ago. As an example, Region 5 is reaching out to partners to assist with SCC identification. Region 4 has developed a regional planning team to support revisions, institutionalize lessons learned, and incorporate theses into new efforts to gain efficiencies.

The agency is working to embrace partnerships, improve collaboration and foster effective communication. In some areas, shared stewardship is working well. In other areas, it continues to be a challenge because of a lack of trust or engagement with groups that lack the necessary balance of interests. As some noted the tension between getting revisions done on time and getting them right, (e.g. partnerships and collaboration take time), others noted that sometimes partners provide capacity and solutions that can actually speed the process up. Several regions are engaging youth and tribes in plan revisions and management. The RPDs see value in continuing to engage collaborative councils to assist with planning. Several stated that regionally based councils would provide greater benefit because they would be closer to the land and issues. In closing, several Committee members expressed their gratitude to the RPDs for their graciousness and willingness to engage the Committee as partners.

### **Convey Committee Recommendations to the Forest Service**

Tony Tooke, Chief of the Forest Service, thanked members and shared that the Committee has served as ambassadors and a model for collaboration that inspired many others within and outside of the agency. The Forest Service is committed to implementing the Committee's final recommendations. Working group co-chairs briefly summarized their recommendations. Highlights include:

- Shared Stewardship – Partnerships are the future for the Forest Service. The Committee's recommendations focus on the need for the agency to prioritize partnerships and clarify potential limitations or ambiguities in the Rule and Directives (e.g. fiscal capability, cross boundary planning and management).
- Youth Engagement –The planning process presents the opportunity to engage and educate youth, connect with families, and strengthen relationships between urban and rural communities. Youth are our future; the agency needs to address internal barriers to youth engagement, leverage

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Bethke, Tony Erba, Peter Gaulke, Dave Hayes, Mary Beth Hennessey, Al Olson, Julia Riber, Jennifer Ruyle, Julie Shaeffers, Jenna Sloan, Deb Whittall

outside expertise via public-private partnerships, and engage youth through internships and volunteer opportunities as a form of successional planning.

- Planning for Success – The Committee’s recommendations touch on the importance of adaptive management and developing a suite of plan components that meet partner expectations and create a framework for efficient project planning. There is a need to balance regulatory certainty and agency flexibility within plans through a transparent planning process that clearly identifies uncertainty.
- Species of Conservation Concern – SCCs are a complex issue and the Committee urges ongoing learning; members continue to observe inconsistencies in implementation due to differing interpretations of or ambiguities within the Rule and Directives. There are opportunities to engage partners and outside experts in the process to increase effectiveness and transparency. In addition, the planning process provides the opportunity to educate the public on the intent and importance of the SCC process.
- Monitoring – Monitoring should inform management and is key to adaptive management. Therefore, it is integral that forests develop measurable plan components that allow the agency to assess plan effectiveness. The biennial reports provide a great opportunity to build consistency across units and can serve as powerful tools for decision makers and partners. Broad scale monitoring offers the potential to leverage agency capacity, inform management, and build relationships.
- Objections – The recommendations build on the Chief’s shared stewardship and customer service priorities. Based on learning via stakeholder calls, the Committee recommends that the agency align the multiple objections processes to reduce confusion and complexity. The Committee also recommends that the agency develop an intervenor status that allows supporters of a draft plan to fully participate in resolution meetings.
- Path Forward – The Committee recommends that the agency form a collaborative National Oversight Council as a part of the national oversight process for accountability and consistency called for in the Rule.<sup>2</sup> Many members are interested in serving on the Council to continue to harness the expertise and relationships developed within this Committee. There is real value in this Committee’s ability to engage in civil dialogue around controversial issues. Several stated that the Council’s scope should extend beyond planning to include implementation.

### Public Comment

Vera Smith, The Wilderness Society, thanked members for their service and shared her appreciation for the depth of the Committee’s conversations. Meryl Harrell noted that the Committee has gone above and beyond expectations and helped the Rule grow from infancy to kindergarten. The Committee embodies shared stewardship and has had a material impact on planning. There is a wealth of institutional knowledge and capacity in this Committee that will evolve into something valuable in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Each working group used templates to: (1) elaborate problem/opportunity statements, (2) provide recommendations to addresses issues, and (3) provide examples - Many of these were drawn from August 2017 Plan Component Workshop Workbook, or from other information that seemed appropriate to the Committee based on members’ personal experiences and knowledge.

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<sup>2</sup> 36 CFR 219.2(b)(5)(ii)