
CHAPTER 1

PURPOSE AND NEED

INTRODUCTION

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service (FS) has prepared this Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and other relevant federal and state laws and regulations. This FEIS discloses the direct, indirect, and cumulative environmental impacts that would result from the proposed action and alternatives. The document is organized into five chapters:

- ▶ **CHAPTER 1. PURPOSE AND NEED FOR ACTION:** This chapter includes information on the history of the project proposal, the purpose of and need for the project, and the agency's proposal for achieving that purpose and need. This section also details how the USDA FS informed the public of the proposal and how the public responded.
- ▶ **CHAPTER 2. ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION:** This chapter provides a more detailed description of the Agency's proposed action as well as alternative methods for achieving the stated purpose. These alternatives were developed based on significant issues raised by the public and other agencies. Finally, this section provides summary tables of the environmental consequences associated with each issue.
- ▶ **CHAPTER 3. AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSEQUENCES:** This chapter describes the environmental effects of implementing the proposed action and other alternatives.
- ▶ **CHAPTER 4. PREPARERS:** This chapter provides a list of preparers and agencies consulted during the development of the final environmental impact statement.
- ▶ **CHAPTER 5. DISTRIBUTION LIST:** This is a list of individuals and organizations that have been sent a copy of the FEIS and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan.
- ▶ **APPENDICES:** The appendices provide more detailed information to support the analyses presented in the FEIS.

PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of this proposed action is to revise the Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests. The revised LRMP guides all natural resource management activities on the Ozark-St. Francis National Forests (OSFNFs) to meet the objective of Federal law, regulations, and policy. The proposed action would also affect a wide range of socioeconomic factors as they relate to natural resources. The existing LRMP for the OSFNFs was approved July 1986. As of FY 2004, the existing LRMP has been amended 13 times. Revision of the LRMP is now needed to satisfy regulation requirements and to address new information about the forests and their uses.

The regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) instruct the Regional Forester to make periodic revisions to LRMP and to provide the basis for any revision. The instructions to revise forest plans, the basis for revision, are found in Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 36 CFR 219.10(g).

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) describes the analysis of five alternatives for revising the LRMP of the OSFNFs and discloses the environmental effects of the alternatives. The FEIS is guided by the implementing regulations of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) found in the Council of Environmental Quality (CEQ) Regulations, Title 40, CFR, Part 1500. The companion document to this FEIS is the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP)—a detailed presentation of the preferred alternative.

FOREST PLAN DECISIONS

National Forest System resource allocation and management decisions are made in two stages. The first stage is the LRMP-level decisions, which allocates lands and resources to various uses or conditions by establishing management areas and management prescriptions for the land and resources within the plan area. The second stage is approval of project-level decisions.

Land and Resource Management Plans do not compel the Agency to undertake any site-specific projects; rather, plans establish overall goals and objectives (or desired resource conditions) that the individual national forest strives to meet. Land and Resource Management Plans also establish limitations on what actions would be authorized, and what conditions would be met during project level decision.

The primary decisions made in a Land and Resource Management Plan include:

- ▶ Establishment of the forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives [36 CFR 219.11(b)].
- ▶ Establishment of forest-wide management requirements [36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27].
- ▶ Establishment of multiple-use prescriptions and associated standards for each management area [36 CFR 219.11(c)].
- ▶ Determination of land that is suitable for the production of timber [16 U.S.C. 1604(k) and 36 CFR 219.14].
- ▶ Establishment of allowable sale quantity for timber within a time frame specified in the plan [36 CFR 219.16].
- ▶ Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements [36 CFR 219.11(d)].
- ▶ Recommendation of roadless areas as potential wilderness areas [36 CFR 219.17].
- ▶ Where applicable, identify those lands which are administratively available for leasing [36 CFR 228.102 (d)] and when appropriate, authorize the Bureau of Land Management to offer those specific lands for lease [36 CFR 228.102 (e)].

The authorization of site-specific activities within a plan area occurs through project decision making, which is the implementation stage of forest planning. Project level decision requires compliance with NEPA procedures and a determination that the project is consistent with the LRMP.

SUPPORTING ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENTS

The following Environmental Impact Statements contain environmental analyses that are not repeated in this FEIS, but provide supporting documentation for some of the forest plan decisions.

- ▶ *Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Suppression of the Southern Pine Beetle* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region 1987)
- ▶ *Final Environmental Impact Statement for RARE II* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region 1979)
- ▶ *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Vegetation Management in the Ozark-Ouachita Mountain* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region 1990)
- ▶ *Final Environmental Impact Statement, Wild and Scenic River Study Report on Thirteen Rivers in the Ozark National Forest* (USDA Forest Service, Ozark National Forest 1991)
- ▶ *Ozark-Ouachita Highlands Assessment* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region 1999)
- ▶ *Final Environmental Impact Statement for Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation* (USDA Forest Service, Washington Office 2000)
- ▶ *Southern Resource Assessment* (USDA Forest Service, Southern Region 2002)

FOREST PROFILE

Located in a land of rolling hills and mountains primarily in Northwest Arkansas, the Ozark National Forest was created by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. The Ozark National Forest is divided into six ranger districts and one job corps located in 16 counties. It contains six geographical units in Northwest Arkansas: Wedington, Lee Creek, Main Division, Magazine, Sylamore, and Henry R. Koen Experimental Forest. The 1.2 million acres of forest consist of two-thirds mixed oak and hickory hardwood and one-third shortleaf pine forest ecosystems. The Ozark National Forest is characterized by steep slopes with vertical sandstone and limestone bluffs.

The St. Francis National Forest is located in two counties in eastern Arkansas and derives its name from the St. Francis River. Most of the forest is situated on Crowley's Ridge but a portion is in the low flatlands along the Mississippi River. The St. Francis National Forest, one of the smallest national forests, covers 21,000 acres.

The St. Francis National Forest was established in 1960 when it was administratively combined with the Ozark National Forest.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Public involvement is a key part of the planning process. Providing for public comment helps identify what people want from the national forests in the form of goods, services, and environmental conditions. Issues submitted by the public, as well as from within the Forest Service, guided the need to change current management strategies. Some of the issues listed below were obtained from appeals of the forest plans. The public also submitted issues during public involvement efforts conducted by Forest Service personnel during the past three years.

In addition to the emerging issues, the need for change was identified through the Analysis of the Management Situation. This analysis also provides a basis for formulating a broad range of reasonable alternatives. A detailed account of the public involvement process is in Appendix A, "Summary of Public Involvement."

PLANNING PROCESS

Forest planning occurs within the overall framework provided by implementing the regulations of NFMA and NEPA. National, regional, and forest planning form an integrated three-level process. This process requires a continuous flow of information and management direction among three Forest Service administrative levels. Information from forest planning flows upward to the national level for use in the RPA program where, in turn, information flows back to the forest level. In this structure, regional planning is the principal process for conveying information between forest and national levels.

Planning actions required by the NFMA and used in this planning process are:

1. Identification of issues, concerns, and opportunities.
2. Development of planning criteria.
3. Inventory of resources and data collection.
4. Analysis of the Management Situation.
5. Formulation of alternatives.
6. Estimation of effects of alternatives.
7. Evaluation of alternatives.
8. Recommendation of preferred alternative.
9. Approval and implementation.
10. Monitoring and evaluation.

The results of Planning Steps 1 to 8 are described in this document. Refer to Appendix A, "Summary of Public Involvement" and Appendix B, "The Analysis Process," for more detail on the results of these steps.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

The following issues and planning questions were used to develop alternatives for the forest plan revision process.

1. **Mix of Recreation Opportunities**

The Forests need to determine the mix of developed and dispersed recreation, the type of development, settings, and services to provide in the next 15 years.

2. **Public Access**

The Forests need to determine the combination of land allocation for public access, open and closed roads, and motorized travel to minimize conflict among users, provide recreation opportunities, and protect the resources.

3. **Special Areas**

The Forests need to determine what special areas are needed. Some examples are: wild and scenic rivers, special interest areas, wildernesses, scenic byways, research natural areas (RNAs), and experimental forests.

4. **Ecosystem Health and Sustainability**

The Forests need to determine what actions and land allocations are needed to ensure the health of ecosystems while considering plant, animal, and human interaction.

5. **Relationship of National Forest Management to Communities and Economies**

The issue is how to balance the economic and social needs of the public while managing for forest health and sustainability.

PLANNING PROCESS RECORDS

The Ozark-St. Francis National Forests Interdisciplinary Team is responsible for developing the Revised Forest Plan. Efforts were made to provide detailed explanations of each step of the revision in the form of process (or planning) records. This FEIS contains summaries of the process records and includes references to the parent records. Process records are on file in the Forest Supervisor's Office. To review these records, contact:

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