

Appendix A

Public Involvement in Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities



Mark Twain
National Forest

Cover image: Horseback Riders on Kaintuck Hollow Trail

Photographer: Charlie Gill, Mark Twain National Forest

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Introduction

The first step in the forest planning process (36 CFR 219.12(b), 1982 Regulations) is for the interdisciplinary team to identify and evaluate public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities, including those identified during public participation activities and coordination with other agencies and entities. The Forest Supervisor then determines which of these issues, concerns, and opportunities to address in the revision process. This appendix describes how the Mark Twain National Forest met this requirement.

Process Used to Identify Issues

Key points in the forest plan revision process where the public provides input include developing the need for change, identifying potential issues and possible alternatives for addressing the issues, analysis of possible environmental effects, and publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Proposed Forest Plan.

The Forest Supervisor and Regional Forester identified forest plan revision needs in the Assessment of the Need for Change for the Mark Twain National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The Need for Change discusses the process and information used to develop proposed changes to the 1986 Forest Plan. A Notice of Intent to Revise the Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register on April 16, 2002.

Public Involvement Methods

The Mark Twain National Forest used a variety of public involvement tools and methods, including public meetings, open houses, newsletters, and news releases to engage individuals, organizations, state and local governments, and other federal agencies in the Forest Plan revision.

The Forest hosted a series of public meetings both before and after the Notice of Intent was issued to provide information about the forest plan revision process and gather public input on the scope of the decisions to be made, issues to be examined and possible alternatives. Subsequent Forest-planning open houses, newsletters, and news releases informed the public about the progress of the revision. The Forest consulted and exchanged information with local county governments, State agencies, and other national forests and federal agencies throughout the plan revision process to aid in development of revised management goals and objectives, and standards and guidelines.

Meetings and Open Houses

Early in 2002, we held three public meetings before we published our Notice of Intent. Forest resource specialists made presentations and were available for a question and answer period. The meetings were held at 7 o'clock in the evening on the following dates and locations:

- Thursday January 17, 2002 at the Settle Inn in Branson, Missouri;
- Tuesday January 22, 2002 at the Senior Center in Houston, Missouri; and
- Tuesday February 5, 2002 at the Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center in Kirkwood, Missouri (suburb of St. Louis)

We felt these locations would be the most convenient for people with interest in National Forest management. Four people attended the Branson meeting. Thirty people came to the meeting in Houston, and 103 people attended the Kirkwood meeting.

Public input from these meetings was used to help determine necessary changes, actions that should be taken, and issues to be reviewed in the Forest Plan revision process. From public input and internal evaluations, we developed the proposed action and began the NEPA process by publishing a Notice of Intent (NOI) in the Federal Register.

After the NOI was published, we held four more public meetings in June 2002 to give the public a chance to meet the Forest Planning staff and other resource specialists, to become more familiar with the planning process, and provide input on plan revision. These meetings were in the evening from 7:00 to 8:30 on the following dates and locations:

- June 6, 2002 at the Civic Center in West Plains, Missouri;
- June 13, 2002 at the Black River Coliseum in Poplar Bluff, Missouri;
- June 20, 2002 at the Civic Center in Farmington, Missouri; and
- June 27, 2002 at the Lenoir Community Center in Columbia, Missouri

Sixteen people attended the West Plains meeting, 19 came to Poplar Bluff, 7 to Farmington, and 24 to Columbia. Revision Topics were refined, alternatives developed, and effects described based on input from those meetings.

In April 2003, we held another series of meetings to provide information on our approach to ecosystem management, discuss Off-Highway Vehicle use on the Forest, answer questions and hear what the public had to say. The meetings were at 7:00 in the evening on the following dates and locations:

- Tuesday April 8, 2003 at the Senior Center in Alton, Missouri;
- Thursday April 10, 2003 at the Community Building in Ozark, Missouri;
- Tuesday April 22, 2003 at the City Hall in Salem, Missouri; and
- Tuesday April 29, 2003 at the Madison County Senior Center in Fredericktown, Missouri

These meetings were useful in letting the public know the direction we are taking in revising the Forest Plan. It helped keep the public informed of where we were in the process and gave us an opportunity to learn from their questions and concerns.

In February 2004, we held another round of meetings to discuss the alternatives we had developed, clarify our position, and answer any questions. These meetings were in the evening on the following dates and locations:

- February 10, 2004 at the University of Missouri in Rolla, Missouri; and

- February 17, 2004 at the Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center in Kirkwood, Missouri

In February of 2005, after the release of the Proposed Revised Forest Plan and DEIS, we held another series of open houses to present the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and answer questions about the analysis and the preferred alternative. These meetings were held in the evening from 6:00 to 8:00 on the following dates and locations:

- February 8, 2005 at the Powder Valley Conservation Nature Center in Kirkwood, Missouri (suburb of St. Louis);
- February 15, 2005 at the Old City Hall Building in Salem, Missouri;
- February 22, 2005 at the Civic Center in West Plains, Missouri;
- March 15, 2005 at the Black River Coliseum in Poplar Bluff, Missouri;
- March 22, 2005 at the Library Center in Springfield, Missouri

These meetings were important for providing the public a forum to ask questions about the Proposed Revised Plan so that they could provide comments that were more informed.

Special Meetings Requested by Groups

Throughout this process, several meetings were held with other state and federal government agencies and special interest groups to talk about specific issues. Meetings were arranged and held at the request of the group or agency.

- On July 23, 2002, the Missouri Equine Association invited the Forest Planning Team to make presentations and answer questions at their meeting at the Greene County Library in Springfield, Missouri. Over 227 people attended.
- On April 12, 2003, a meeting was held with the Missouri Coalition for the Environment to discuss revision topics and concerns in Rolla, Missouri. Nine members of the Coalition attended this meeting.
- On June 19, 2004, another meeting was held with the Missouri Coalition for the Environment to discuss revision topics and concerns in Rolla, Missouri. Six people from the Coalition attended.
- On April 29, 2004, the Forest planning team met with the American Foresters Policy Committee to discuss the Forest Plan Revision and National Forest management.
- On January 12, 2005, the Forest Supervisor and Deputy Forest Supervisor met with Brent Bryant, Missouri Cattlemen's Association, in Jefferson City, MO, to discuss the proposed reduction in grazing allotments and various ways to maintain a stable range program.
- On January 22, 2005, the Forest Supervisor met with the Cedar Creek Grazing Association to discuss the proposed reduction in grazing allotments and various ways to maintain a stable range program.
- On February 12, 2005, the Forest Supervisor met with the Conservation Federation to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.
- On April 5, 2005, the members of the Forest planning team met with the Missouri Department of Conservation to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.
- On March 24, 2005, members of the Forest planning team met with the representatives of the Environmental Protection Agency to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.

- On March 10, 2005, the Forest Supervisor for the Mark Twain National Forest met with the Missouri Department of Natural Resources to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.
- On May 3, 2005, the Forest Supervisor and some members of the planning team meet with the Coalition for the Environment to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.
- The Forest Supervisor participated in several meeting with the Missouri Forest Products Association to discuss the Forest Plan Revision.

Federal Register Publication

On April 16, 2002, we published a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement to Revise the Forest Plan in the Federal Register. The NOI described the Revision Topics in detail and explained how the public could get more information or provide their comments on the topics. Comments received in response to the NOI were used to refine the Revision Topics, develop alternatives, and describe effects in the Draft EIS.

We published a Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft EIS and Draft Forest Plan in the Federal Register on February 4, 2005. The NOA described the preferred alternative and explained how the public could get additional information or provide comments. Comments received about the Draft EIS and Forest Plan were considered and incorporated into the Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD). Responses to the comments received can be found in Appendix A-1 of this Final EIS.

Newsletters

Nine issues of the Mark Twain National Forest *Planning Journal* were sent to a mailing list of almost 600 addresses. The first issue of the *Planning Journal* was published in October 1997. Each issue contained information about our Forest Plan and provided several ways for the public to get involved in the process. There were informative articles discussing the role of a Forest Plan, describing various aspects of the planning process and regulations, introducing the Forest Supervisor and staff tasked with revising the Plan, and continual updates on the status of the revision. Each *Planning Journal* coincided with significant milestones in the process, such as announcing publication of the NOI, or accompanying distribution of the Annual Monitoring and Evaluation Report. They discussed important developments, like the Programmatic Biological Assessment and Biological Opinion for Endangered Species, or gave detailed explanations of the Forest transportation system policy.

News Releases

At every significant milestone, news releases were prepared and distributed to area newspapers, including the Associated Press and National Public Radio. Each news release informed the public of the status of our revision and gave them information on how to provide comments or get additional information.

Letters

In order to keep them informed of our progress, describe our proposal, and ask for concerns several entities received individual letters. We sent Forest Plan Revision information to Jay Nixon, Attorney General for the State of Missouri. On May 7, 2002, twenty-nine Presiding Commissioners for each county with National Forest System land received a letter describing Forest Plan revision and detailing how to get additional information. District Rangers followed up with phone calls or personal visits. Additionally, sixteen Native American tribal

leaders with interest in management of the Mark Twain National Forest were sent letters to informing them of our planning process and activities.

Website

The Mark Twain National Forest posted information and pertinent documents about Forest Plan Revision on its website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r9/forests/marktwain/>. All correspondence referenced the website so anyone with access to the internet could find additional information on the Revision.

Public Input and the Forest Plan Revision Topics

The Forest Plan revision process focused on revision topics. The revision topics address central issues and public concerns to which future management of the Mark Twain National Forest must respond. The Proposed Forest Plan and alternatives were developed to answer questions raised by these revision topics. The following discusses how public input influenced each of the revision topics.

Revision Topic 1 - Vegetation and Timber Management

Issues and Public Concerns

A number of respondents suggest that Forest management should include a non-commercial alternative option. This option should explore the economic and ecological impacts of the non-commercial approach. The role of Forest Service management then becomes to adopt policies and techniques of assisting in recovery of the natural integrity of the Forest to the point where natural processes can function unencumbered. Others advise the Mark Twain to restrict or prohibit commercial development of natural resources.

A number of respondents comment in general that the Mark Twain National Forest should end commercial timber sales. Some argue moreover that it is not necessary to harvest timber from public land inasmuch as private landowners are capable of meeting the country's timber needs; and that foreign exportation of timber from the Mark Twain should be banned.

Revision Topic 1a – Identify lands suited to timber production

Issues and Public Concerns

Many people agree that we should re-evaluate lands suitable for timber production. Some suggest reducing the allowable sale quantity by excluding riparian, roadless, and recreation areas from consideration. In addition to considering environmental effects, others ask that re-evaluation of timber suitability consider the impact on local economies. People also encourage the Forest to take intermediate and long-range projections of timber harvest levels into account in the Forest Plan revision.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Old growth, the Seven Sensitive Areas, Riparian Management Zones, glades, cedar hardwoods, recreation areas, and protection areas for karst features is removed from lands suitable for timber production. Revised demand estimations and harvest yield tables, and recalculated ASQ determinations are the basis for those changes.

Revision Topic 1b – Maintain oak-hickory, shortleaf pine and oak-pine communities by providing for adaptive management and greater flexibility of silvicultural techniques

Issues and Public Concerns

There are considerably different viewpoints regarding the topics of even-aged and uneven-aged management. While many support even-aged management for mast production, for purposes of measuring specific habitat conditions, and for the benefit of early-successional dependent wildlife; others are just as adamant that no clear-cutting or even-aged management be allowed in the Mark Twain.

Finally, some express concerns relative to certain species. Specifically, people ask the Mark Twain NF to explain the basis for its decision to maintain oak-hickory, shortleaf pine, and oak-pine communities by silvicultural techniques; to continue restoration of the shortleaf pine forests of southern Missouri; and to continue to delineate the land-type associations and ecological land types on which allow pine planting.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Forest Plan standards and guidelines specifying where even-aged and uneven-aged management can be used were eliminated, thereby providing greater flexibility. Project level analysis will yield decisions regarding silvicultural systems and methods.

Revision Topic 2 - Ecological Sustainability and Ecosystem Health

Revision Topic 2a - Restore and maintain healthy forest ecosystems; provide a healthier balance of shortleaf pine and white oak; restore open woodland habitats

Issues and Public Concerns

Numerous respondents assert that the Mark Twain National Forest should promote forest ecosystem health and sustainability. Notes one respondent, “The Forest Service should adopt techniques and policy that seek to assist in the recovery of the natural integrity of the ecosystem to the point where natural processes can function unencumbered and without negative effects outside the natural range of variability.” Many argue that “emphasis should be to restore forest habitats to their historically native species.” Several suggest that “Missouri has few pristine areas left, and the forest, wildlife, and public could best be served by ecological restoration of glades and savannas.”

Some respondents ask the Mark Twain NF to address native plants in the forest plan revision. Specifically, some urge the Forest to maintain natural forest types, aggressively restore natural vegetation and native terrestrial communities on large regional scales, and identify and protect all unique plant communities.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

The 2005 plan places greater emphasis and focus on restoring and enhancing ecosystems at the terrestrial natural community level. Forest-wide standards and guidelines reference use of the Terrestrial Natural Communities of Missouri (Nelson 2004) and the local historic land survey data for purposes of project inventory, vegetation mapping, and determining treatments appropriate to meeting desired condition. Forest Plan objectives are based upon historical amounts and distribution patterns of natural communities, and vary by ecological subsection. Management Prescriptions 1.1 and 1.2 identify globally significant natural communities, target specific areas for priority treatment, and protect examples of viable ecosystems. Forest Plan objectives focus on management activities, such as prescribed

burning or timber harvest, to promote ecological functions by emulating disturbance processes.

Revision Topic 2b - Encourage natural vegetation by allowing pine and oak reforestation and stand improvement in a wider variety of situations

Issues and Public Concerns

Very few people commented on this topic. Those that did comment encouraged the Forest to use the full array of silvicultural tools to achieve forest health and ecosystem composition objectives, and to continue restoration of shortleaf pine communities where they would have occurred before European settlement of the area.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

The 2005 Forest Plan removes restrictions in management prescriptions on the type of reforestation and timber stand improvement. This allows pine and oak reforestation and stand improvement in a wider variety of situations.

Revision Topic 2c - Provide a wide diversity of natural communities and wildlife habitat conditions

Issues and Public Concerns

A number of people urge the Mark Twain NF to protect and restore wildlife habitat, particularly for native species and those species requiring large tracts of contiguous forest. Some stress the particular need to preserve bird habitat. That will result, some point out, in increased bird populations, which will in turn feed on insects which otherwise cause so much forest damage. Others ask that we enhance ruffed grouse populations by preserving their habitat .

Some urge the Mark Twain to promote aggressively early successional conditions—in order to promote population growth in early successional bird species, and to comply with NFMA’s requirement to maintain viable populations of all native wildlife. Others express an interest in old growth conditions. According to one respondent, the Forest should evaluate old growth opportunities, “independently of potential timber stands. Opportunities must be based on both landscape and structural characteristics. Any stand that meets either or both characteristics should be designated old growth.” Some say priority for inclusion in old growth designations should be riparian areas.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Management direction is developed to provide wildlife habitat, contribute to recovery of threatened and endangered species, and protect species at risk by restoring and enhancing forest health and ecological integrity for a range of early, mid, and late successional forested ecosystems. Definition of desired conditions for a range of natural variability in structure, composition, basal area and ground cover characteristics for various natural communities exist in Management Prescriptions 1.1 and 1.2. Objectives vary by ecological subsection, based on historical amounts and distribution patterns of natural communities. Management prescriptions provide specific objectives for old growth and young forest habitats . Protection is provided for special habitats and the species that use them.

Revision Topic 2d – Revise list of Management Indicator Species (MIS)

Issues and Public Concerns

Respondents agree that the MIS list needs revision. Specific suggestions include species that reflect health of the ecosystem; those requiring large, unbroken blocks of habitat; old growth species; early successional species; large predators; endangered species; amphibians; and species that could serve as indicators of water quality.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

The list of management indicator species focuses on species most likely to provide an indication of the effects of management to natural communities considered most in need of restoration.

Revision Topic 3 - Fire Management

Issues and Public Concerns

General concerns regarding fire management are varied. One individual asserts that “the Forest Service takes contradictory attitudes toward fire, considering it a hazard that must be mitigated by logging (such as with the recent tornado blow-down) and as a necessary part of the environment that must be applied by humans.” Other respondents urge the Mark Twain NF to address issues surrounding fire fighting, and work with adjacent landowners and communities in promoting fire safety measures.

Revision Topic 3a - Use prescribed fire to restore ecosystems, maintain healthy forests, provide wildlife habitat, and reduce hazardous fuels.

Issues and Public Concerns:

The use of prescribed fire is a topic of concern to numerous respondents. People urge the Mark Twain to use fire to “emulate historic natural disturbance regimes;” to “restore and maintain [the] Ozark’s ecosystems” and thereby restore biodiversity; to “restore some of the large scale communities that benefit from periodic fire;” and to “maintain healthy glades, forests, wildlife habitat, and to reduce fuel loads.” Some, however, caution the Forest to use fire only on a limited basis, while a few say fire should not be used at all “since we in the Ozarks do not have the catastrophic fires of the northwest.”

A number of respondents raise concerns over the adequacy of analysis regarding fire management. Some state that the Mark Twain NF should scientifically assess the history, scope, and ecological role of fire inasmuch as there is presently “little data . . . available to understand the impacts of fire on the forest.” Others urge the Mark Twain to present all studies and other information it is using in the application of fire on the forest inasmuch, some argue, as “there is wide discrepancy in the literature on the effects and necessity of fire in the Ozark region.” Likewise, say some, the Forest should base frequency and seasonal scheduling of prescribed fire on ongoing scientific studies.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Standards and guidelines for the use of prescribed fire for restoration and enhancement of natural communities, and for hazardous fuels reduction are in place. Objectives developed to increase from current levels the number of acres prescribed burned exist.

Revision Topic 3b - Manage wildland fires to protect life, property, and communities.

Issues and Public Concerns:

Commenters asked that we develop standards and guidelines for firefighting, and address the impacts of firefighting. Other suggestions included involving local landowners and communities to promote fire safety awareness.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Suppression response is based on a comprehensive dynamic risk assessment, which identifies values at high risk and appropriate management response. Areas of low risk are identified where a full range of responses are available, including wildland fire use to meet the desired condition. Direction is provided to identify Wildland Fire Management Units.

Revision Topic 3c - Improve and maintain forest health and reduce the intensity of wildland fires through a proactive approach to fire and fuels management.

Issues and Public Concerns:

While there were comments that specifically mentioned treatment of hazardous fuels, the concerns and comments mentioned above for fire management, the use of prescribed fire and wildfire suppression, also apply to this topic.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Forest Risk Assessment identifies areas on the Forest that are at high risk for wildfire. Hazardous fuels reduction treatments focus on community protection. Fire becomes a major component of ecosystem restoration, using a variety of prescriptions including natural fire to meet management objectives.

Revision Topic 4 - Management Areas

Revision Topic 4a - Adjust management area boundaries as needed to incorporate ecological landtypes, current social demands, and management practicalities.

Issues and Public Concerns:

Several writers commented on boundaries and new land-type associations. Suggestions include:

- base management boundaries on national, regional, and local considerations;
- use the revised land-type association (LTA) boundaries to delineate management areas;
- revise management unit area descriptions and boundaries according to the latest ecosystem based classifications; and
- describe a new management unit category for restoring significant native landscapes, one that “[targets] several areas where the best opportunity is presented for restoring the health and vitality of native natural landscapes (including sustainable timber practices)”

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Field verification of new LTAs indicates that resolution is too fine for programmatic direction, and were not used to define management area boundaries. New management area boundaries are based on the identification of priority areas for restoration of natural

communities, existing management area boundaries, and management practicalities. Forest Plan Objectives are prescribed by ecological subsection, rather than by LTA.

Revision Topic 4b - Protect Roadless, wilderness, wild, and scenic river values, and other “special areas.”

Issues and Public Concerns:

A number of respondents request that the Mark Twain NF protect special areas in the forest. Some ask us to set aside more land for special area designation and be preserved in protective management designations.

With respect to special area allocations, a number of respondents express specific concern over the management of roadless areas. Many respondents ask the Mark Twain to protect roadless areas. Some say simply that the Forest “should strive to maintain the integrity of all unroaded areas, no matter how small in size.” Others point to characteristics of roadless areas as justification for their protection, e.g. that they serve as models of habitat restoration, are resistant to fire and invasive pests, provide refuge for endangered species, and are important for recreation and their existence value. A number of people also urge the Mark Twain NF to manage roadless areas as wilderness areas, and to recommend roadless areas to Congress for wilderness designation.

Some also advise the Mark Twain to recommend more areas in general for Wilderness designation— some suggest recommending greater amounts of contiguous acreage, others suggest recommending the entire forest.

Finally, respondents also offer comments regarding wild and scenic river designations. Some ask the Forest to review standards and guidelines for managing wild and scenic rivers to see whether they should be tightened based on past implementation; others ask us to recommend high quality rivers for inclusion in the wild and scenic river system.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Roadless areas were inventoried and evaluated for their potential for Wilderness designation. Some of those areas adjacent to existing Wilderness, including Irish excluded lands, are recommended for study.

A rivers inventory did not identify any additional rivers with potential for inclusion in the Nation’s Wild and Scenic River system.

Revision Topic 5 - Riparian Areas and Water Quality

Issues and Public Concerns:

Numerous respondents advise the Mark Twain NF to manage the forest with water quality in mind. Several writers ask the Forest to protect water quality by restricting certain activities, particularly road construction, timber harvest, mining, grazing, and use of herbicides. Respondents also ask the Mark Twain to revise riparian guidelines, to allow flexible site-specific management, protect surface and subsurface waters, and protect karst lands.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Riparian areas and aquatic ecosystems are defined based on landform, soils, hydrologic criteria and plant communities. Riparian Management Zones and Watershed Protection Zones established to restore and maintain ecological function and processes of riparian areas, aquatic systems and water quality. Standards and guidelines are developed to protect water quality and ecological processes associated with karst terrain and karst features.

Revision Topic 6 - Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Viability

Issues and Public Concerns

Many respondents assert that the Mark Twain NF should address threatened and endangered species in the Forest Plan revision in order to comply with the Endangered Species Act, and to reflect recent data.

Others, however, disagree. According to one writer, the recent amendments “made several significant changes to the way that the Forest Service would manage the Mark Twain Forest for those species identified in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. This amendment adequately covers the present need and any unforeseen need can be addressed with future amendments.”

Aside from the question of whether this topic should be formally addressed in the Forest Plan revision, numerous respondents write that the Mark Twain should make a special effort to protect threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Particular species mentioned include mountain lions, endangered reptile and amphibian populations, the Ozark hellbender, bats, eagles, and various rare butterflies.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Management direction provides for federally listed species not previously addressed. Management for other federal and RFSS are refined and updated.

Revision Topic 7 -Access and Transportation Management

Issues and Public Concerns:

Of those respondents who address construction, maintenance, or closure of roads, the majority ask the Forest to either restrict or prohibit any more road construction or to close roads. These writers assert that the current backlog of needed road maintenance and negative effects roads have on other resources are sufficient grounds for foregoing more construction.

Likewise, some urge the Mark Twain NF to close roads, particularly unclassified or non-essential roads.

On the other hand, a few respondents ask the Mark Twain to upgrade main entrance roads to wilderness areas, and to keep roads open as they provide access for fire fighting.

Revision Topic 7a - Road density standards in management area prescriptions

Issues and Public Concerns:

Some respondents assert that the Mark Twain NF should develop road density standards “because road densities and placement can have a significant impact on wildlife, recreation, water quality, and scenic beauty.” Likewise, others request that the MTNF reduce road density in sensitive areas both because of the maintenance backlog and because of attendant erosion.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Recreation opportunity spectrum class objectives are assigned for each management prescription, which replace road density standards.

Revision Topic 7b – “Woods Roads”

Issues and Public Concerns:

Commenters would like clarification of terminology used for different types of roads.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

The term “woods road” is eliminated. Those roads will be assigned standard maintenance levels.

Revision Topic 7c - Forest Plan Transportation Map

Issues and Public Concerns:

Commenters noted that new regulations require forests to maintain a roads inventory.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

The Forest Plan Transportation map will be eliminated. The Forest Transportation Atlas will contain an inventory of roads on the Forest. Changes to the road system will be project level decisions.

Revision Topic 7d - OHV and ATV use on the forest

Issues and Public Concerns:

Of those who address the use of “closed unless posted open” signs for roads, the consensus is that they should be changed to “open unless posted closed.” Respondents argue that the use of these signs is counterproductive inasmuch as:

- more dispersed riding areas are needed
- many roads that were once open have not been posted as open
- current policy is unenforceable;
- it is “inappropriate and or confusing as it contradicts all other normal and traditional marking of travel ways across the country;” and
- reversal of this policy would be more workable and acceptable to user groups.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Forest direction for OHV and ATV use is stated more clearly.

Revision Topic 8 - Monitoring and Evaluation

Issues and Public Concerns:

Many agreed with the need for effective and meaningful monitoring of management activities.

How addressed in Proposed Forest Plan

Strategy for monitoring and evaluation reflects ecosystem management and ecological sustainability concepts and approaches. The monitoring strategy focuses on information that will (1) enhance understanding of resource management issues; (2) is measurable and scientifically supported; and (3) is feasible given probably budgets.

Resources with No Change in Management Direction

There was no change in management direction for several resource areas under any of the alternatives considered in detail in this FEIS. These resource areas and the reasons for not changing them are summarized in the Assessment of the Need for Change and Notice of Intent that was released in 2002.

Many decisions and management direction provided in the 1986 Forest Plan appear to be adequately addressed and do not need to be changed. While some decisions or resource areas may have a high level of interest, this alone does not insure they will be addressed in the Forest Plan Revision. Others areas are not considered to be among the highest priority topics to be included in this revision. Parts of the Forest Plan that are most frequently mentioned as needing revision are described below, along with rationale for not changing them at this time.

Rivers eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation

The 1986 Forest Plan identified parts of seven rivers, which flow through the Mark Twain National Forest, as eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers system. Formal suitability studies are required to determine whether a recommendation be made to Congress regarding designation of these rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. These suitability studies have not been undertaken.

Under current Forest Plan direction, these rivers and the NFS lands around them are managed to perpetuate their current condition and protect their unique qualities. There has been no widespread public support, or any indication from the State, other Federal agencies, or Congressional delegations that there is a need to change the current management of these rivers or to conduct a suitability determination at this time.

We do not propose any changes to the management direction for the rivers currently identified in the 1986 Forest Plan as eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation.

Off-road vehicle use on the Forest

Under the current plan, the Forest is, “closed unless posted open” to motorized use. This means that off-road vehicle use is restricted to designated trails or use areas. Off-road vehicles may also use Forest Service classified roads (system roads), if the vehicle complies with State law. The Forest Plan allows for development and designation of additional trails and use areas. Currently, the only designated trails on the Forest are the Sutton Bluff trail system, and the only designated use area is the Chadwick Motorcycle and ATV Use Area.

Off-highway vehicles (OHV) and all-terrain vehicles (ATV) users have expressed a strong interest in using existing, unclassified roads. The Forest Plan considers all unclassified roads to be closed, whether or not there is a physical closure, and therefore off-limits to all motorized vehicle use. Over the last several years, use of the Forest by off-road vehicles, especially ATVs and OHVs such as Jeeps, has increased exponentially. Much of this use occurs off-road as well as on unclassified roads, and has become increasing difficult to manage.

Some nearby Forests originally allowed off-road and off-trail OHV and ATV use, but found the use to be very heavy and difficult to manage. Those Forests initiated planning processes resulting in significant plan amendments that changed the management from “open unless posted closed” to “closed unless posted open.”

Allowing motorized use of unclassified roads, essentially allowing off-road and off-trail use, would radically change the existing Forest Plan direction for Mark Twain National Forest lands. Based on monitoring results, interpretation of national policy trends, other Forests’ experiences, and our own experiences trying to manage ATV and OHV use, we do not believe that a major change in Plan direction is warranted for off-road motorized use.

Recreation Management

The Forest recently amended the Plan to update goals and management direction for recreation. The amendment expands emphasis of the recreation program from providing dispersed recreation to include providing quality, developed sites. The amendment added direction that allows investments in recreation facilities needed to meet needs and desires of the public being served by the facility and to provide recreation visitor information. The amendment also added Management Prescription 7.1 to the Forest Plan, emphasizing intensive recreation opportunities occurring in the more highly developed recreation areas. Management Prescription 7.1 better defines the desired future condition for developed recreation areas, as well as expectations and objectives by which recreation areas will be managed. It also provides increased flexibility as trends in recreation activities change, allowing for greater diversity in recreational opportunities. We do not propose any additional changes in direction for recreation management at this time.

Heritage Resources Management

Another recent 1986 Forest Plan amendment addresses current federal mandates and compliance requirements for heritage resources. Processes were included for preservation efforts to restore and interpret selected heritage sites, increase public outreach, and develop public education and volunteer programs. We do not propose any additional changes in direction for heritage resources management at this time.

Fish and Aquatic Management

An additional amendment to the Forest Plan incorporates goals and management direction for fish and aquatic species into the Forest Plan. The amendment provides for protection of aquatic ecosystems, restoration of degraded aquatic ecosystems and recovery of threatened and endangered aquatic species, and enhancement of aquatic resource user opportunities by increasing system productivity, improving user access and/or associated amenities, and providing environmental education and interpretation. We do not propose any additional changes in direction for fish and aquatic management at this time.

Minerals Exploration

Under the Mineral Resources on Weeks Law Land Act of March 4, 1917, mineral prospecting is permitted on lands acquired by Weeks Law Act authority, which includes most lands of the Mark Twain National Forest. While the Bureau of Land Management has responsibility and authority over federally owned minerals, including those lying under National Forest System lands, the Forest Service is responsible for administration of surface resources on the Mark Twain National Forest.

The 1986 Forest Plan states that all lands are available for exploration when methods and technologies are used that do not disturb the land surface. Surface-disturbing exploration, including core drilling, is permitted where it is compatible with management area objectives. Surface-disturbing exploration is prohibited on administrative sites, developed recreation sites, endangered and threatened species habitat, National Trails System, over known caves, and in Wilderness. The goals established in the Forest Plan for minerals management are to provide for mineral prospecting and mineral development while complementing other resource management objectives. Management direction protects soil, water, wildlife, scenery and other resources.

There is a high level of interest and widely differing opinions about mining and processing of lead in Missouri. The responsibility of the Forest Service regarding mining is limited to

surface activities, primarily those associated with exploration for minerals. We believe that the Forest Plan contains appropriate and adequate direction in regards to the surface activities associated with mining that occur on the Mark Twain National Forest, and we do not propose any changes to management direction in the 2005 Forest Plan.

Changes between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

We received a great deal of public and internal comments on our Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and the Proposed Revised Plan. Based on the many comments received, several changes were made to the Forest Plan, and additional analysis was added to the FEIS.

The changes range from minor edits and clarifications to changes in the standards and guidelines and monitoring requirements. Changes are described in detail in Chapter 2 of this FEIS. See also response to comments in Appendix A – 1 for additional information.

