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## Chapter I - Understanding the Forest Plan

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### Introduction

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Lying between the shores of Lake Michigan and Lake Huron in the northern half of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan, the Huron-Manistee National Forests (Forests) are located in a transitional zone between forested lands to the north and agricultural lands to the south. Formed by glaciers thousands of years ago, these lands are characterized by relatively low relief, abundant sand, clear water and diverse forests. These lands were exploited by wholesale clearcutting, burning and poor farming practices around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The diverse, maturing forest ecosystems that exist today are the result of nearly a century of forest management by the Forest Service and its conservation partners.

The Forests serve as a “backyard” playground for many Midwest residents with over 60 million people living within a day’s drive of enjoying the Forests’ recreation opportunities. Much of the Forests’ lands are intermingled with private and state lands and other recreational facilities.

Water resources on the Huron-Manistee National Forests include 1,800 miles of streams and 17,000 acres of lakes. The Forests contain legendary high quality, cold-water river systems of national significance. The Au Sable, Manistee, Bear Creek, Pere Marquette and Pine Wild and Scenic Rivers and tributaries provide a nationally-recognized network of premier “blue ribbon” fishing opportunities.

The Huron-Manistee National Forests continue to provide a variety of benefits to the people who use them. The Forests’ vegetation management program is the primary tool for restoring and providing a diverse range of sustainable habitats for many species, supporting forest health and providing wood fiber. The Forests also provide unique habitats for a variety of rare and sensitive fish, plant and animal species, including approximately one-half of the known breeding habitat in the United States for the endangered Kirtland’s warbler. The Forests also provide critical habitat for other threatened and endangered species such as piping plover, Pitcher’s thistle, bald eagle and Karner blue butterfly; and provide habitat for a variety of game species. The Huron-Manistee National Forests also provide opportunities for the development of mineral resources, where such use can occur in an environmentally safe and sound manner.

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### Location of the Forests

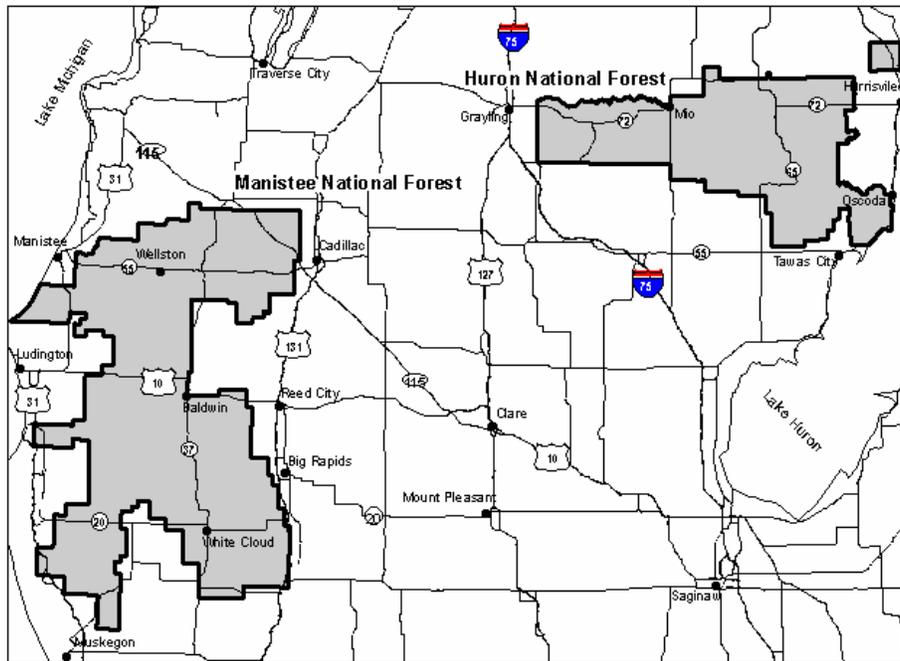
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The Huron-Manistee National Forests are located in the northern Lower Peninsula of Michigan. As shown in Figure I-1, the Forests are actually two proclaimed National Forests combined in 1945 for administrative purposes.

The Huron National Forest is approximately 60 miles wide and from 12 to 30 miles long. It abuts Lake Huron at Tawas and north of Harrisville and is located in portions of Alcona, Crawford, Iosco, Ogemaw and Oscoda Counties.

The Manistee National Forest is approximately 40 miles wide and 75 miles long. It abuts Lake Michigan south of Manistee and extends inland south to the Muskegon area and is located in portions of Lake, Manistee, Mason, Mecosta, Montcalm, Muskegon, Newaygo, Oceana and Wexford Counties.

**Figure I-1. Location Maps of the Huron-Manistee National Forests.**



## Purpose of the Forest Plan

The Huron-Manistee National Forests' Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) guides all natural resource management activities for the Huron-Manistee National Forests. It describes desired resource conditions, resource management practices, levels of resource production and management, and the availability of suitable land and resource management.

The purpose of the Forest Plan is to provide management direction to ensure that ecosystems are capable of providing a sustainable flow of beneficial goods and services to the public. More specifically, it establishes:

- Goals and Desired Conditions: How the Forests should look if the Forest Plan is successfully implemented.
- Objectives: Measurable, planned results that contribute to reaching the desired conditions.
- Standards: Required action or resource status designed to meet the desired conditions and objectives.
- Guidelines: Preferred action used to reach desired conditions and objectives.
- Management direction that is applicable Forest-wide.
- Management direction that is applicable only to specific management areas.
- Management direction that is applicable only to specific landscape ecosystems.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements.
- Designation of land as suitable or not suitable for timber production and other resource management activities.

Land use determinations and Standards and Guidelines constitute a statement of the Forest Plan's management direction; however, the actual outputs, services, and rates of implementation are dependent on annual budgets from Congress.

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## Revising the Forest Plan

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### ***Revising the 1986 Forest Plan, as Amended:***

A Forest Plan for the Huron-Manistee National Forests was issued in 1986. The National Forest Management Act regulations require that forest plans be revised every 10 to 15 years (36 CFR 219.10). This Forest Plan is a result of that revision process.

The Huron-Manistee National Forests prepared a Final Environmental Impact Statement in 2006. The revised Forest Plan is based on the alternative that the Regional Forester selected in the Record of Decision for the Forest Plan Revision (2006). The selected alternative, Alternative B, is described in Chapter II of the Final Environmental Impact Statement and the Record of Decision.

The revised Forest Plan is a result of extensive analysis and considerations addressed in the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Final Environmental Impact Statement refers to or describes the planning process and the analysis procedures used to develop the revised Forest Plan. The Final Environmental Impact Statement also describes other alternatives for the Forest Plan that were considered in the planning process.

This revised Forest Plan completely replaces the 1986 Forest Plan, as amended.

### ***Forest Plan Revision in the Future:***

The Forest Supervisor is required to review conditions of the land at least every five years to determine if the Forest Plan needs to be revised. If monitoring and evaluation indicate that immediate changes are needed and these needed changes cannot be handled by amendment, then it would be necessary to revise the Forest Plan. As stated earlier, the Forest Plan will be revised every 10 to 15 years.

### ***Forest Service Planning Rule:***

The 2004 Forest Plan revision process was conducted under the 1982 version of the Forest Service planning rule, as permitted by section 219.13(e) of the 2004 rule. Subsequent revisions or amendments to the Forest Plan will be developed under applicable planning rules.

### ***Consultation with Tribes:***

Beginning in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, the government of the United States made treaties with various American Indian tribes and bands. To ensure that the rights of sovereign American Indian governments are fully respected, the President has directed agencies to operate within a government-to-government relationship. This includes consultation with tribal governments prior to taking actions affecting resources in which Tribal governments may have an interest; assessment of the impact of plans, projects and programs to assure that tribal governments' rights and interests are considered; and the removal of any procedural impediments to working directly and effectively with tribal governments.

The Forest Service honors the U.S. government trust responsibility and treaty obligations toward American Indian tribes within a government-to-government relationship throughout the process of preparing and implementing the revised Forest Plan.

Government-to-government consultation is ongoing between the Forest Service and American Indian tribes and bands that were signatory to the Washington Treaty of 1836 and Saginaw Treaty of 1819. These American Indian tribes and bands have treaty right interests in the Forests. This consultation supports Executive Order 13175 (November 6, 2000), which recognizes the sovereignty of federally-recognized American Indian tribes.

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## **Relationship of the Forest Plan to Other Documents**

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- **Organic Administration Act of 1897:** The Organic Administration Act of 1897 authorized the creation of what is now the National Forest System. The law established forest reserves “to improve and protect the forests within the boundaries, or for the purpose of securing favorable water flows, and to furnish a continuous supply of timber for the use and necessities of the citizens of the United States...”

- **Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960:** In this Act, Congress affirmed the application of sustainability to the broad range of resources over which the Forest Service has responsibility. This Act confirms the authority to manage the national forests “for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish purposes.”
- **Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968:** For the segments of rivers that have been designated or considered eligible for consideration as National Wild, Scenic, or Recreational Rivers under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the Forest Service is required to provide for the protection of the river values. The Forest Plan addresses resource protection, development of land and facilities, public use and other management practices necessary or desirable to maintain the eligibility of the river segments.
- **National Environmental Policy Act of 1969:** The National Environmental Policy Act ensures that environmental information is made available to public officials and citizens before decisions are made and before action is taken. This disclosure helps public officials make decisions based on an understanding of environmental consequences and take actions to protect, restore and enhance the environment. Essential to this process are accurate scientific analyses, expert agency input and public involvement; all of which have been part of the revision process. The revised Forest Plan has been analyzed and the potential effects have been disclosed in the accompanying Environmental Impact Statement. The Act may also require environmental analysis and disclosure for some site-specific actions implemented under the Forest Plan.
- **Endangered Species Act of 1973:** One of the purposes of the Endangered Species Act is to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered and threatened species depend may be conserved. The Act requires federal agencies to carry out programs for the conservation of endangered and threatened species in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.
- **National Forest Management Act of 1976:** The National Forest Management Act requires that National Forest System lands be managed for a variety of uses on a sustained basis to ensure in perpetuity a continued supply of goods and services to the American people. The Act's regulations also establish analytical and procedural requirements for developing, revising, and amending forest plans. The Forest Plan embodies the provisions of the National Forest Management Act and regulations on forest plan implementation.

The National Forest Management Act requires that “permits, contracts and other instruments for use and occupancy” of National Forest System lands be “consistent” with the Forest Plan [16 U.S.C. 1640(i)].

- **Healthy Forest Restoration Act of 2003:** This Act provides new tools to be used to reduce the wildfire risk to communities, municipal water supplies and other at-risk federal lands; and provides for the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems. The Forest Plan includes direction on reduction of hazardous fuels.

- **Forest Service Directives:** The Forest Service Directive System, including the Forest Service Manual and the Forest Service Handbook, provides Forest Service direction and is not repeated in the Forest Plan.
- **Management Direction:** Management direction is guidance for managing resources and uses of National Forest System lands. This direction has been developed for resources, for instance, wildlife and vegetation, on a Forest-wide basis and for management areas. Chapter II contains management direction that applies Forest-wide. More specific direction for individual management areas is in Chapter III.

Direction for managing National Forest System land comes from a variety of levels. National and regional direction includes laws, Executive Orders, regulations and Forest Service policy, although they may not be restated in the Forest Plan. Forest Plans adhere to national and regional management direction. Forest plans set Forest-wide, landscape, and management area land management direction through the objectives, desired conditions, Standards and Guidelines. Site-specific, project-level decisions implement the direction in the Forest Plan.

Goals, desired conditions and objectives often form the purpose and need for site-specific projects. Not every project will further each goal and objective, but those goals and objectives that are prescriptive in nature and apply to the project are not optional.

Some management direction refers to existing conditions. Existing conditions are the conditions found at the time of Forest Plan revision unless otherwise noted in the resource-specific or management area-specific direction.

- **Goals, Desired Conditions, and Objectives:** Goals and desired conditions are broad statements that describe the situation that the Forest Service will strive to achieve. They are generally timeless and not measurable. Goals and desired conditions describe the ends to be achieved, rather than the means of doing so. They are a narrative description of the state of the land and resources expected when objectives and their associated Standards and Guidelines are fully met.

Goals and desired conditions are not absolutes. Their primary purpose is to be considered when planning management activities. Efforts will be made to move resources toward desired conditions or maintain the current condition, if the current condition is the desired condition.

In many cases, there will be short-term impediments to reaching desired conditions, such as the current state of the resource, but the long-term aim would be to reach the desired conditions. Some areas on the landscape may be far from the desired condition, while other parts may be in the desired condition or have a greater likelihood of reaching it sooner.

Goals are broad statements of the Forests' overall purpose, while desired conditions describe what the Forests should look like in the future.

Objectives are measurable steps taken within a specified timeframe to move toward a desired condition. Objectives are generally achieved by implementing a site-specific project or activity. However, objectives are not “targets”. Targets for outputs are dependent upon budget and may or may not reflect Forest Plan emphasis areas.

Forest-wide objectives have been developed for resources, such as water (see Chapter II). Specific objectives were also developed for each landscape ecosystem (see Chapter II) and for management areas (see Chapter III).

- **Standards and Guidelines:** Standards and Guidelines are the specific technical direction for managing resources. They provide another link in moving toward the desired conditions.

Standards and Guidelines apply Forest-wide to National Forest System lands, unless more specific management area direction is found in Chapter III of the Forest Plan.

Only measures that are specific to the Huron-Manistee National Forests are included in the Standards and Guidelines. Laws, regulations and policies that apply to the entire National Forest System are not reiterated in the Standards and Guidelines. In addition, desired conditions and objectives that have a prescriptive component are not repeated in the Standards and Guidelines.

Standards are required limits to activities. These limitations help the Forests to reach the desired conditions and objectives. Standards also ensure compliance with laws, regulations, executive orders, and policy direction. Deviations from Standards must be analyzed and documented in Forest Plan amendments.

Guidelines are preferable limits to management actions that may be followed to achieve desired conditions. Guidelines are generally expected to be carried out. They help the Forests to reach the desired conditions and objectives in a way that permits operational flexibility to respond to variations over time. Deviations from Guidelines must be analyzed during project-level analysis and documented in a project decision document, but these deviations do not require a Forest Plan amendment.

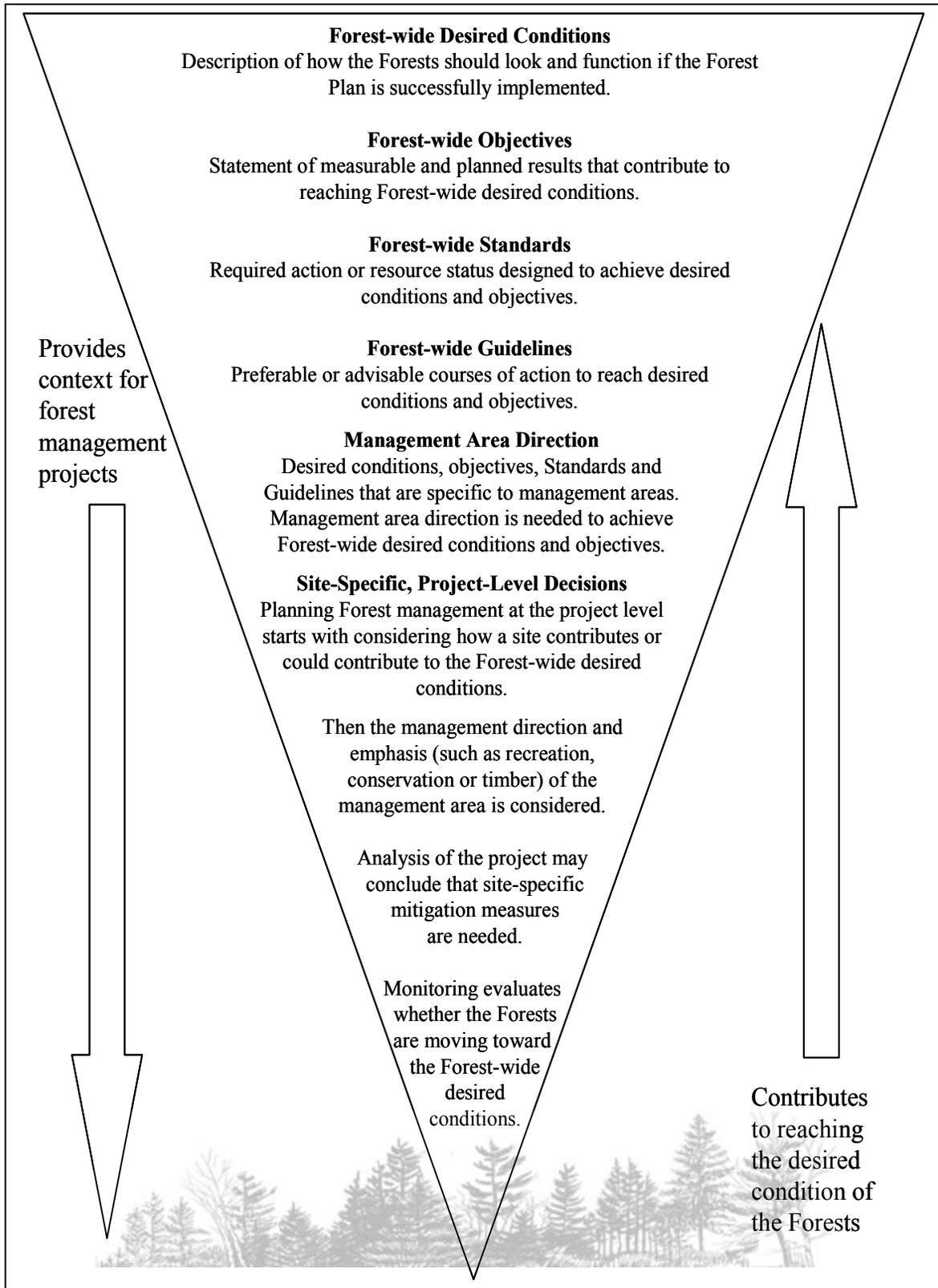
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## Implementing the Forest Plan

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The Forest Plan provides a framework and context that guides the Huron-Manistee National Forests’ day-to-day resource management operations. It is a strategic, programmatic document and does not make project-level decisions (see Figure I-2)

**Figure I-2. Process of Implementing the Forest Plan: Relationship Between Management Direction in the Forest Plan and Site-Specific Projects.**



***Basic Principles of Management:***

A set of fundamental principles guide management of the Huron-Manistee National Forests. Direction in the Forest Plan adds to and qualifies these basic principles.

- **Principle 1:** The Forest Service follows laws and regulations, as well as policies in Forest Service Manuals and Handbooks, which relate to managing National Forest System lands in addition to numerous treaties and trust responsibilities. The Forest Plan is designed to supplement, not replace, direction from these sources.
- **Principle 2:** The Forest Service coordinates management activities with the appropriate local, state or Tribal governments, as well as with other federal agencies.
- **Principle 3:** The Forest Service actively consults with Tribal governments and collaborates with interested organizations, groups and individuals.
- **Principle 4:** The Forest Service manages the Huron-Manistee National Forests for multiple uses. The Huron-Manistee National Forests are open for any legal public activity or management action, unless specially restricted in law, policy or the Forest Plan. While allowed, such activities and actions may require administrative review and authorization before they are implemented.

***Tools and Techniques:***

The Forests will reach their desired conditions for vegetation through natural ecological processes and by using a diverse range of management tools and techniques.

To the extent practical, timber management will be used to emulate naturally-occurring disturbances, for instance fire and windstorms. These management practices will include both even-aged and uneven-aged techniques. Clearcutting will continue to be used on the Forests when it is the optimal method to meet the objectives and requirements of the Forest Plan. The Forests will also use shelterwood, group selection, individual tree selection and other harvest methods to create or maintain multi-aged and uneven-aged stands.

Prescribed fire will be used alone or with silvicultural treatments to mimic the effects of natural fire. Management-ignited fire and lightning-caused fire will help maintain, enhance and restore natural ecological processes on the Forests. Minimum impact management tactics will generally be used in wildland fire suppression and prescribed fire application to reduce adverse fire suppression effects.

The Forests will promote re-growth of harvested or other disturbed forests with a variety of regeneration practices. This includes regenerating forests through tree planting, seeding and natural regeneration. Some areas will naturally change through forest succession.

The Forest will also reach its desired conditions for human uses by using a diverse range of management tools and techniques. Environmentally sustainable management practices will provide commodity and non-commodity resources to contribute to the social and economic stability of local communities. Management practices to achieve this include prescribed fire, timber harvest and traditional gathering activities.

The Forests will provide recreation opportunities in a multiple-use setting by using management tools such as the Scenery Management System and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum.

Ecological functions of watershed and riparian areas will be enhanced or restored through techniques such as reconstructing or improving road and trail crossings, decommissioning unneeded roads, or using silvicultural treatments or fire to enhance shade, coarse wood recruitment or bank stability in riparian areas.

The Forests may create new roads and trails if needed for site-specific projects or to respond to increased demand. The majority of these roads will be Forest Service level 1 and temporary. They will be closed to public motorized use after they are not needed.

### ***Site-Specific Project-Level Decisions:***

“Implementing the Forest Plan” means developing and implementing site-specific forest management projects in order to reach the desired conditions established in the Forest Plan.

Project-level compliance with the National Forest Management Act is primarily concerned with consistency with the Forest Plan and the Act’s regulations.

Compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act involves the correct environmental analysis process for a specific proposal; proper documentation; and public disclosure of effects in an environmental assessment, environmental impact statement or categorical exclusion. When necessary, the Forests will perform environmental analysis on site-specific projects and activities. An analysis file or project file will be available for public review, but it is not always necessary to document the analysis in the form of an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement.

The data and evaluations in the Forest Plan and the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Forest Plan are the basis for environmental analysis of site-specific projects.

The following are examples of project-level decisions that may require additional environmental analysis and disclosure as the Forest Plan is carried out:

- Timber harvest.
- Wildlife improvement projects.
- Prescribed burning.
- Watershed improvement projects.
- Trail or road construction.

***Operational Activities Exempt from the National Environmental Policy Act Procedures:***

Resource inventories, action plans, and schedules do not require additional environmental analysis and disclosure. The following are examples of operational activities that do not constitute project-level decisions and, therefore, are exempt from National Environmental Policy Act procedures:

- Developing five-year wildlife plans.
- Developing fire-situation reports.
- Scheduling maintenance for developed recreation sites.
- Preparing land ownership adjustment plans.

***Budgets:***

Annual Forests' budget proposals are based on the activities and actions required to achieve the desired conditions and objectives of the Forest Plan. The Forests' budget is approved on an annual basis by Congress.

Congress appropriates funds for stewardship and management of all 192 million acres of National Forest System land across the country. These appropriated funds are key to achieve the desired conditions and objectives stated in the Forest Plan through implementation of site-specific projects.

Upon receipt of the final budget, the Forests annually prepare an implementation budget. This budget is a result of program development, work planning and monitoring processes. Adjustments and changes to the Forests' program of work reflect current Congressional priorities within the overall management direction contained in the Forest Plan. The funding distribution between program components and the intensity or level of activities in those programs is a reflection of the Forest Plan as well as the will of Congress. The level of funding dictates the rate of implementation of the Forest Plan.

***Forest Plan Amendments:***

Most proposed activities will be consistent with direction in the Forest Plan. When management actions are found to be inconsistent with Forest Plan direction or site-specific analysis shows an error in the Forest Plan, the Forest Plan or the proposal must be adjusted according to the analysis. Adjusting the Forest Plan would require an amendment.

The need to amend Forest Plan management direction may result from:

- Changes in physical, biological, social or economic conditions.
- Recommendations of an interdisciplinary team based on the results of monitoring and evaluation.

- Determination by the Forest Supervisor that existing or proposed projects, permits, contracts, cooperative agreements or other instruments authorizing occupancy and use are appropriate, but not consistent with elements of the Forest Plan management direction.

Conflicts may be identified between different sections of management direction. For instance, there could be discrepancies in the selected alternative map and the narrative description of the selected alternative. The Forest Plan does not prioritize management direction; therefore, a discrepancy would need to be resolved by determining the management intent using a variety of information, such as the planning record, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and the revised Forest Plan. Minor technical errors may be corrected via errata and may not require a Forest Plan amendment.

The Forest Supervisor will determine whether proposed changes to the Forest Plan are significant or non-significant. “Significance” as used here, is defined by the National Forest Management Act regulations and is different than significance as used under the National Environmental Policy Act.