

Introduction

Land Management Plan Context and Purpose

The purpose of a Land Management Plan (hereinafter referred to as the “Plan” or “Land Management Plan”) is to provide overall strategic guidance for the sustainable management of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) by guiding relevant resource management programs, practices, uses and projects. This Plan sets the overall context for informed decisionmaking by evaluating and addressing the social, economic, and ecological systems relevant to the IPNF. This Plan applies to National Forest System (NFS) lands and:

- Is strategic in nature. This Plan does not include decisions with on-the-ground effects that can be meaningfully evaluated through a site-specific NEPA process. Those decisions are made later, only after further analysis and further public involvement.
- Was developed through public involvement and collaboration, which started at the earliest stages of Plan development and will continue through Plan completion, project planning, and monitoring.
- Contributes to social, economic, and ecological sustainability. This Plan aspires to meet the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- Emphasizes the role of best available science. New knowledge and information can be analyzed and added to this Plan at any time.
- Describes and identifies the five plan components discussed in the following section.

This Plan emphasizes an adaptive management approach that results in a collaborative process and a dynamic document that can be improved upon at any time. Such an informed and adaptive guide to land stewardship allows the Forest Supervisor to better utilize Forest staff and resources to manage the Forest. The adaptive management cycle includes Plan development; Plan implementation; Plan monitoring, inventory and assessment; and Plan review and evaluation. The findings of Plan review and evaluation reveal any needs to change the Plan, which begins the adaptive cycle again.

Plan Components and Organization

The Plan is organized into three chapters: Vision, Strategy, and Design Criteria. Each chapter includes one or more of the five Plan components: desired condition, objectives, suitability, special areas, and guidelines.

The following explains the organization of this document and helps the reader understand how to interpret the guidance included in the five Plan components:

Chapter 1. Vision: The vision describes the future conditions for the IPNF. It provides strategic direction and describes the roles, contributions, and setting of the Plan area. It sets context for management by describing the desired conditions of both the entire Forest as well as individual, community-based geographic areas. The vision is long-term and reflects ecological timeframes and social desires. The vision also contains monitoring questions that will be used to assess progress towards achieving desired conditions.

Desired Conditions describe the social, economic, and ecological attributes that guide management of the land and resources of the IPNF. Desired conditions are not commitments or final decisions approving projects and activities. Desired conditions may be achievable only over a long period, may be reached in the short term, or may already exist.

Chapter 2. Strategy: The strategy describes how the Forest intends to move toward the desired conditions. It includes key objectives for anticipated levels of conditions, uses, and activities. Suitable land areas at the Forestwide and management area level are identified for a variety of land uses compatible with desired conditions. The strategy also includes recommendations for special area designations.

Objectives are concise projections with measurable, time-specific intended outcomes. The objectives for the Plan are the means of measuring progress towards or maintaining desired conditions. Objectives are not commitments or decisions approving projects and activities.

Suitability of Areas are areas that are identified across the Forest or by management area that are generally suitable for various uses and activities. The identification of an area as generally suitable for a use is guidance for project and activity decisionmaking but is not a commitment or decision for a specific project or activity.

Special Areas are areas within the Forest designated for their unique or special characteristics. These special designations are also identified by a management area. Special areas may be designated by statute, by a Plan, Plan amendment, or Plan revision, or by a separate process in accordance with NEPA and other applicable laws (36 CFR 219).

Chapter 3. Design Criteria: Design criteria provide sideboards to guide management activities that help move the Forest toward desired conditions. Guidelines provide specific information and guidance for project decisionmaking. Management direction found in public laws, regulations, existing decisions, and Forest Service manuals and handbooks is generally not repeated in this chapter and is identified as other sources of design criteria.

Guidelines are for project and activity decisionmaking to help achieve desired conditions and objectives. Guidelines are not commitments or decisions approving projects or activities in the Plan area.

Land Management Plan Consistency

This Plan does not make project-level decisions nor does it contain commitments to implement specific projects; those decisions are made after further public involvement and detailed analysis.

During Plan implementation, projects and activities must be consistent with the Land Management Plan (36 CFR 219.8(b)). Consistency with the Plan is achieved by being consistent with the Plan components in the following ways:

Desired Conditions and Objectives (Ch. 1 and 2) - 36 CFR 219.7(a)(2)(i) and (ii): Most projects and activities are developed specifically to achieve or maintain one or more of the desired conditions and objectives of the Plan. It should not be expected that each project or activity will contribute to all desired conditions or objectives in every instance, but only to a selected subset. Furthermore, some projects and activities may not be clearly related to a specific social, economic, or ecological desired condition or objective of the Plan (for example, facility maintenance may be proposed without a corresponding

desired condition or objective for that proposal), so it also should not be expected that in every instance, a project can clearly point to a specific desired condition as the reason the project was proposed.

To be consistent with the Plan, a project or activity can:

- maintain or achieve one or more desired conditions or objectives,
- be neutral to relevant desired conditions or objectives, or
- have negative short-term effects, but beneficial long-term effects to one or more desired conditions or objectives.

To the extent practicable, documentation for projects and activities will identify which desired conditions and objectives are being addressed, and whether these conditions and objectives are being advanced, are not affected, or are temporarily slowed. Project documentation is not required to address all the available opportunities that could meet or work toward achieving desired conditions in a project area, but will instead focus on specific social, economic, or ecological conditions that prompted the need for the proposal.

Suitability of Areas (Ch. 2) - 36 CFR 219.7(a)(2)(iv): The Plan identifies areas that are generally suitable for a variety of multiple uses (36 CFR 219.12(a)). The Plan shows where these uses are compatible or incompatible with the area's desired conditions. The actual suitability for a particular use, even if an area is identified as generally suitable for a use, will not be determined until a project or activity is authorized. Moreover, it is not possible to anticipate every project or activity that could be proposed throughout the Forest and throughout the life of a Plan. An approved project or activity is considered consistent with the Plan if the project or activity is consistent with the general suitability identification and is consistent with other relevant Plan components. If the project or activity is not consistent with this identification, the responsible official should amend the Plan.

Special Area Guidance (Ch. 2) - 36 CFR 219.7(a)(2)(v): Special areas may have different management direction that represents their unique or special characteristics. For example, a botanical area may have desired conditions that differ from the larger landscape surrounding that special area. Project consistency for a special area would be determined in the same manner as consistency with other desired conditions, suitability identifications, and guidelines as discussed previously, but would be specific to that area.

Guidelines (Ch. 3) - 36 CFR 219.7(a)(2)(iii): To be consistent with guidelines, a project or activity will apply relevant guidelines, unless there is a documented reason to adjust the guideline for a specific project or activity. If the adjustment would be neutral with regard to relevant social, economic, or ecological conditions or would be a more appropriate way to achieve or maintain desired conditions and objectives, the responsible official will describe the proposed adjustment and explain the relationship to desired conditions and objectives in the project-level environmental analysis and decision documents. In such cases, a Land Management Plan amendment generally is not required.

Plan Set of Documents

One of the concepts of the 2005 Planning Rule and the associated directives is to create Plans that are flexible, easily updated, and adaptive in nature. One of the ways to achieve this is to

recognize that the Plan consists of a set of documents that collectively describe management direction, reflect monitoring information, include adjustments and changes, and provide supporting rationale and documentation. This Plan Set of Documents includes the following:

The Land Management Plan- This document contains the strategic management direction for the Forest and includes a management area map.

Approval Document - This document will include the decision, the rationale for the decision, and other information.

Evaluation Reports- The evaluation report is the principal document that supports the need to amend or revise a Plan (36 CFR 219.6). There are three types of evaluation reports:

1. Annual evaluations of monitoring information;
2. Evaluations for Plan amendments;
3. Comprehensive evaluation reports (CER) for Plan development or Plan revisions. The CER describes conditions and trends for the sustainability topics found in this Plan.

Monitoring Guide- The monitoring guide includes elements to be monitored, monitoring questions, measures, and frequency of measure. Monitoring may be used to evaluate the various components of the Plan and provide information for future changes. Monitoring will also gauge progress and determine the Forest's success and ability to reach desired conditions.

Environmental Management System (EMS) - The 2005 Planning Rule requires the Forest Service to establish an environmental management system (EMS) for each unit of the National Forest System (NFS). EMS is a standard approach to work that continually improves the environment. The IPNF will develop an EMS using an international standard known as ISO 14001. The standard has 17 requirements, including an independent audit to assure the system is working. Documentation within the Plan set of documents includes compliance with ISO 14001 and the Forest's environmental policy.

Other Documentation - The following documents address 2005 Planning Rule requirements and are included in the Plan Set of Documents:

- Role of Science
- Public Involvement and Collaboration
- Retention and Incorporation of Existing Plan-related Decisions
- References and Citations

Relationship to Other Strategic Guidance

The IPNF contributes to the accomplishment of national strategic guidance in accordance with its own unique combination of social, economic and ecologic conditions. This Land Management Plan helps define our role in advancing the agency's national strategy and reflects the national goals which are based on the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA).

This Land Management Plan is reflective of the mission of the USDA Forest Service, which is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the

needs of present and future generations.” The mission statement is captured by the phrase, “Caring for the land and serving people.”

Rights and Interests

A land management plan is intended to be adaptable while providing a framework that guides future management decisions and actions. As such, a plan does not create, authorize, or execute any ground-disturbing activity. A plan does not grant, withhold or modify any contract, permit, or other legal instrument, does not subject anyone to civil or criminal liability and creates no legal rights. This Plan does not change existing permits and authorized uses. A land management plan is not an action-forcing document; therefore, it is not a major federal action having a significant effect on the quality of the human environment.

About the Idaho Panhandle National Forests

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests (IPNF) consist of three individual national forests - the Kaniksu, the Coeur d’Alene, and the St. Joe. In 1973, these Forests were combined to be administratively managed as one national forest (for ease of discussion throughout this document, the Idaho Panhandle National Forests will be referred to as the IPNF or Forest when referencing the single administrative unit, the staff that administers the unit, or the NFS lands within the unit).

The IPNF is divided into five ranger districts, which are also the geographic areas described in Chapter 1: Bonners Ferry, Coeur d’Alene River, Priest Lake, Sandpoint and St. Joe. Together they consist of more than 2.5 million acres of public lands in the panhandle of north Idaho with small areas extending into eastern Washington and western Montana. Of the total 2,500,700 acres, about 2,351,100 acres are in Idaho, 31,200 in Montana, and 118,400 acres in Washington. Access into the Forest is via U.S. Highways 90, 95 and 2, and Idaho State Highways 200, 57 and 1.

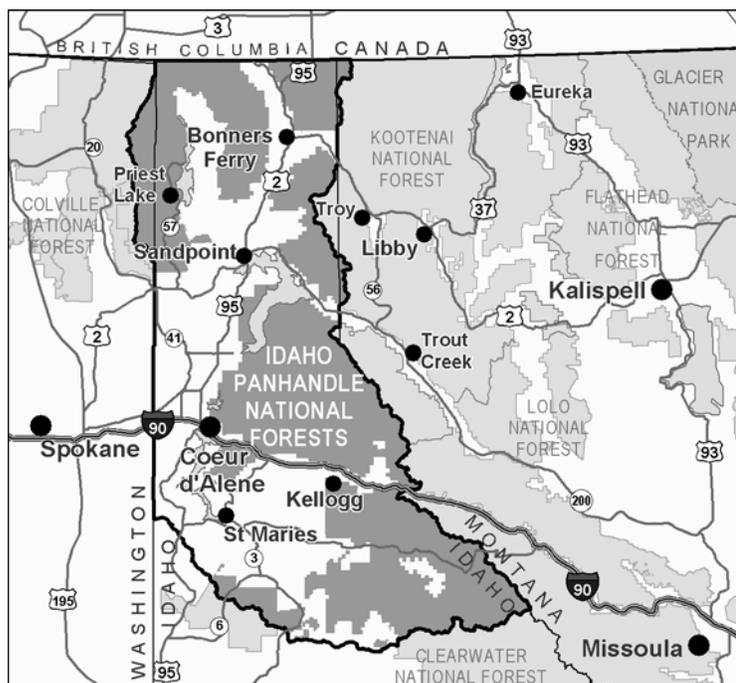


Figure 1. Vicinity map

The Forest as a whole is characterized by several mountain ranges interspersed with large lakes and extensive river valleys. Mountain ranges include the Selkirk, Cabinet, Coeur d'Alene and Bitterroot ranges. Lakes Coeur d'Alene, Pend Oreille, and the upper and lower Priest Lakes are dominant water features in the area. Major river valleys consist of the St. Joe, Coeur d'Alene, Priest, Pend Oreille, and Kootenai.

The Forest contains some of the most diverse and productive forests in the Northern Region of the Forest Service due to climatic influences and volcanic ash-capped soils. It is the home of many threatened and endangered plant and animal species, and it provides a diversity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats. Grizzly bear, woodland caribou, Canada lynx, bald eagle, gray wolf, bull trout, water howellia, and Spalding's catchfly are examples of some of these listed and rare species.

The principal population centers within the IPNF are Coeur d'Alene and Sandpoint, Idaho. Smaller communities that have social, economic, and historic ties to the IPNF include St. Maries, Wallace, Kellogg, Priest River, Bonners Ferry, and Priest Lake. The nearest large urban area, Spokane, Washington, has a social and economic influence on the local communities. The majority of land administered by the IPNF is located in Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, Benewah, and Shoshone counties in Idaho and Pend Oreille County in Washington. Smaller portions of land are also found in Lincoln and Sanders counties in Montana, and Latah and Clearwater counties in Idaho. Logging, mining, and ranching have played important roles in many of these communities throughout the history of the area and continue to do so in varying degrees throughout the Forest today.

Recreation opportunities abound in the IPNF. Visitors come from across the nation, as well as Spokane and local communities to fish and boat the numerous rivers and lakes. Other popular recreation activities include hiking, biking, sight-seeing, horse-back riding, hunting, Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) use, recreational prospecting, snowmobiling, skiing, huckleberry picking, driving for pleasure, wildlife viewing, and sightseeing. This visitation and recreation is important to the local economy and is a major reason people choose to live in this area.

Distinctive Features of the Idaho Panhandle National Forests

The IPNF considers people to be an integral part of the forest environment. It is committed to balancing the need to conserve and sustain natural resources while providing for people's demands for products and services, now and in the future.

The unique qualities of the Forest characterize the roles and contributions of the area. Understanding these helps set realistic and achievable desired conditions, which are the basis for management direction over the next 15 years (the life of the Plan).

In addition to the multitude of resource outputs and ecological, social and economic outcomes, described in Chapters 1 and 2 of this Plan, the IPNF has some important and distinctive roles and responsibilities including:

Wildland Urban Interface: Forty percent of the IPNF is within the wildland urban interface. This provides the Forest significant opportunities to partner with landowners and other jurisdictions to improve forest health conditions and reduce the risk of wildfire.

Recognizing individual wildland fire mitigation plans and working in cooperation with counties is an important part of public safety and the Forest's fuels reduction program.

Wildlife and Fisheries: The IPNF is the home of many threatened and endangered plants and animals. Grizzly bear, woodland caribou, Canada lynx, gray wolf, bull trout, and water howellia, are examples of some of these listed species. In addition, coordination and cooperation with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game is an important part of management activities. Information from the Idaho Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy was used and incorporated into supporting analysis for this Plan.

Tribal and Cultural Interests: Working with tribal government representatives throughout this Plan continues to be a critical part of this process. The IPNF recognizes rights and responsibilities with the following tribes: Kootenai Tribe of Idaho, Coeur d'Alene, Kalispel, Spokane, Nez Perce, and Colville Tribes. Participation and interest varies among the tribes depending upon issues and opportunities. All tribes will continue to be welcome partners, through the consultation process, in both the planning process and the implementation of the Plan. This will provide opportunities to work government to government, consult on sacred sites, and to develop policies that might affect these Tribes.

Proximity to Spokane: The IPNF has a distinctive role in its proximity to the large metropolitan area of Spokane, Washington. This adjacent urban area has a large social and economic influence on the IPNF. Much of the recreation that occurs on the IPNF is from the Spokane area. This influence was considered when developing this Plan.

Roadless State Petition Process: The state of Idaho is gathering information for a potential petition regarding the management of roadless areas within the state, including those on the IPNF. This Plan includes management direction for these areas. The Forest will continue to provide information and work with counties on this issue.

Water Resources: The management of the IPNF plays an important role for the area's water resources. The IPNF strives to provide healthy watersheds that are resilient to disturbances and where natural processes function to provide the multiple benefits to the Forest and its users. The IPNF also provides high quality water for many beneficial uses including public water supplies, aquatic habitats, and recreation. Management of municipal supply watersheds is an important function that the IPNF has in support of local communities.

Special Areas: The IPNF provides a broad range of recreational opportunities, some of which are associated with special or unique areas. A few of these special areas include: the Scotchman Peaks recommended wilderness area, the Salmo-Priest Wilderness, the Grandmother Mountain Wilderness Study Area, the St. Joe Wild and Scenic River, and many small designated special areas. In addition, proximity to Lake Coeur d'Alene, Lake Pend Oreille, and Priest Lake make the Forest a destination for recreation and outdoor activities.