



# FOREST PLAN AMENDMENT



# Update

AUGUST 2002

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*John C. Twiss, Forest Supervisor*

## Hello Again! Remember Us?

Our last newsletter dealt with the Phase II scoping opportunity. The scoping period ended January 28, 2002, and 411 responses representing 1,683 people were received during the comment period. In addition, the Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) recognized the special collaborative status of federal, state, and local governments by incorporating five responses.

## Where Are We In The Phase II Amendment Process?

The Phase II Amendment Process started with the publication of the Notice of Intent (NOI) on November 28, 2001. It announced the Forest Service's intent to amend the 1997 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan or LRMP) and prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS). The NOI initiated "scoping," a process for getting public input on the issues to be addressed in the EIS. This newsletter summarizes the scoping comments we received.

## What's Next?

We are now in the alternative development part of the process and once again invite you to participate through a series of open houses. Later this fall, alternatives and issues identified in scoping will be

analyzed for a Draft EIS that will be distributed for public review and comment. The Forest has contracted with Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to prepare the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS is scheduled for publication in March 2003. There will be a 90-day public review and comment period. Comments on the Draft EIS will be addressed in the Final EIS, which will be completed by October 2003. There will be several more opportunities for public input before a final decision is made.

I sincerely thank you for your initial comments, and I hope you will continue to stay involved with this planning effort.

John C. Twiss, *Forest Supervisor*  
Black Hills National Forest

## Wanted: Your Input

### Forest Plan Phase II Amendment Alternative Development Open Houses



Rapid City, SD	September 9, 2002	Ramkota Conference Center, 2111 N. LaCrosse St.	3 - 8 p.m.
Spearfish, SD	September 10, 2002	Northern Hills Ranger District, 2014 N. Main St.	3 - 8 p.m.
Sundance, WY	September 12, 2002	4-H Exhibit Hall, Fairgrounds Loop Rd.	3 - 8 p.m.
Custer, SD	September 13, 2002	BHNF Supervisor's Office, 25041 N. Hwy 16	3 - 8 p.m.

**Mark Your Calendars!**

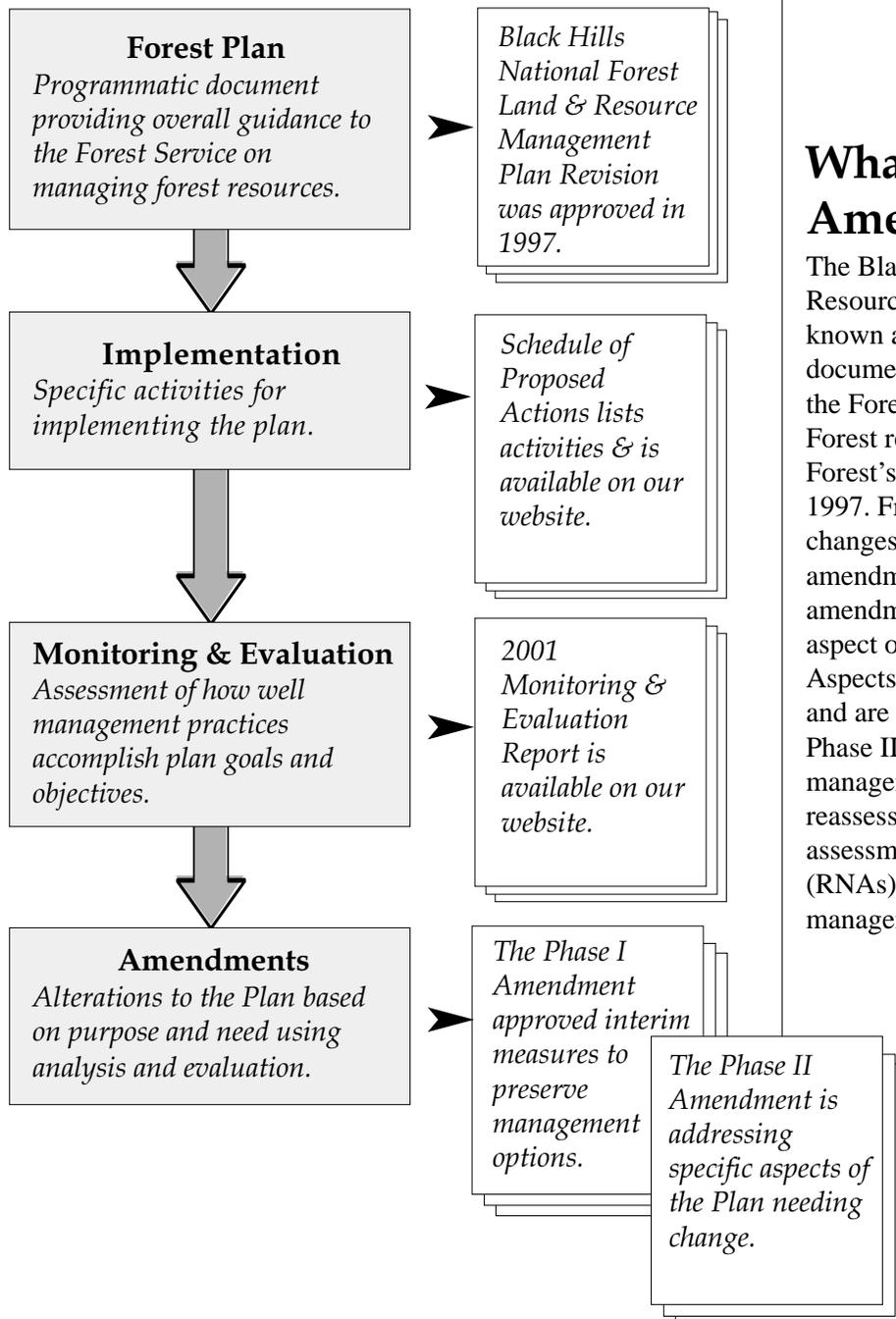
# Phase II Amendment

of the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

**T**he goal of the Black Hills National Forest Phase II Amendment is to establish a program allowing the public to use Forest resources in ways that provide for resource conservation and a healthy ecosystem. 

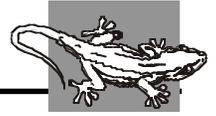


## Planning Process Forest Plan to Amendment



## What is a Plan Amendment?

The Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP), also known as the Forest Plan, is a programmatic document that provides overall guidance to the Forest Service on how to manage the Forest resources. Black Hills National Forest's current Forest Plan was approved in 1997. From time to time, new information or changes in circumstances require amendments to the Forest Plan. These amendments are usually limited to a specific aspect of the plan that needs to be changed. Aspects that are still valid remain in effect and are not altered by the Amendment. The Phase II Amendment is focused on management for species viability, reassessment of timberland suitability, assessment of Research Natural Areas (RNAs), and direction for deer and elk management.



## How Your Comments Have Helped Us

Public input (scoping) is documented and analyzed using a process called content analysis, which is a systematic method of compiling and categorizing the full range of public viewpoints and concerns regarding a plan or project. Content analysis of your scoping comments is intended to facilitate good decision-making by helping the Forest clarify, adjust, or incorporate information into the Amendment. All of your responses (*i.e.*, letters, emails, faxes, and other types of input) are included in this analysis.

The content analysis team (CAT) has completed its work in reviewing each of the comments and prepared a Content Analysis Report dated February 27, 2002. It is available online at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/fp/planning/99Amend/Amend.htm>, along with all the other documents related to the forest-plan-amendment process.

It is important for you to understand that this process makes no attempt to treat comments as votes. In no way does content analysis attempt to sway the decision maker toward the will of any majority. Content analysis ensures that every comment is considered at some point in the decision process.

**We need your continued participation.  
See the last page for the next opportunity  
to contribute.**



## Summary of the Scoping Comments

We received detailed comments during the initial 60-day scoping period. Below is a summary of those comments in outline form.

- I. *Multiple uses (timber production, domestic livestock grazing, mining, etc.) combined with natural disturbances may put species with viability concerns at risk.***
  - a. Active vegetative management of the Forest has resulted in species decline, and the Forest should be returned to a natural disturbance cycle. Wildfire, insect outbreaks, wind-throw, and storm damage are essential to provide varied forest structure and habitat niches.
  - b. The BHNF is threatened with epidemic-level pine beetle infestations and is seriously overstocked with small-diameter trees; the forest health problems present the potential for catastrophic wildfires that will damage economically valuable resources, further diminish forest health, and threaten the lives and property of area residents. Logging can effectively address these problems. Timely and aggressive action is the only viable option.
  - c. Balance is needed when assessing wildlife population viability. Concerns about wildlife should not preclude consideration of other important aspects of the Forest such as multiple use objectives and overall forest health.
  - d. The assessment of wildlife-species-population viability must be weighted equitably within the context of all other multiple uses.
- II. *RNA designation can protect examples of rare and unique ecosystems.***
  - a. Designating additional special management areas such as RNAs will reduce other multiple uses and should not occur or should be extremely limited.

# Phase II Amendment

of the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

## Summary of the Scoping Comments (continued from page 3)

- b. RNAs should only be designated after having established a discrete and useful purpose and scope for proposed study.
- c. Additional RNAs should be designated to protect premier examples of native plant communities, geological features, and other characteristics.

### **III. *The risk of environmental harm to many species and resources is increased from large-stand-replacement fires. On the other hand, some species are dependent upon large-stand-replacement fires.***

- a. Habitat protection involves both a decrease in land-management activities and an increase in tolerance for large-scale disturbances. Natural processes such as wildfire and insect outbreaks should be allowed to provide wildlife habitat and ensure long-term forest health. Logging or spraying chemicals cannot replicate natural processes.
- b. Attempting to create habitat beneficial to wildlife without considering the health of the habitat itself has caused forest-health problems. Managing a healthy forest should be given priority over managing for individual wildlife species.

### **IV. *Some timber stands may have been inappropriately excluded from the suitable timber base in the 1997 Revised Forest Plan.***

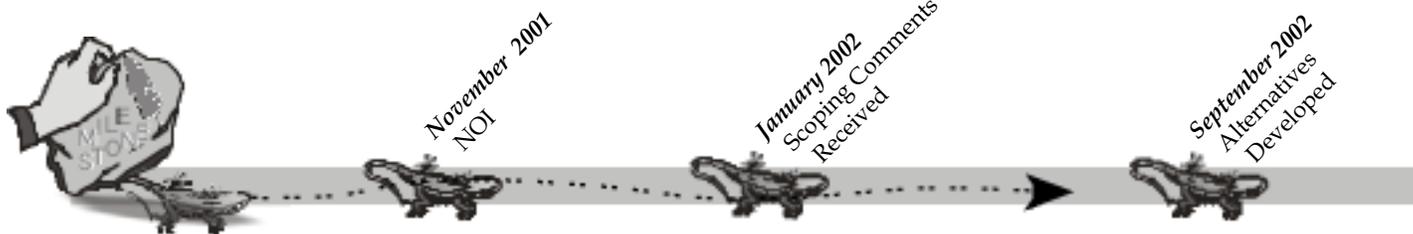
### **V. *Deer and elk habitat evaluation is completely dependent on model outputs in the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan and does not allow for site-specific evaluation by a wildlife biologist. Deer and elk direction may be adjusted due to better science.***

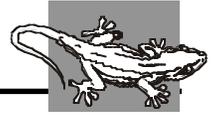
### **VI. *Anticipated output changes may result from large fires and the Phase II Amendment alternatives.***

- a. Providing for economic interests may reduce species viability.
- b. Extractive uses of the BHNF should be eliminated, and the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) should be reduced to account for timber volumes lost to wildfire.
- c. The timber industry is a critical factor in the culture, custom, and economy of the Black Hills. Reduced or delayed logging will jeopardize the timber industry and harm local communities.
- d. Animal Unit Months (AUMs) should be maintained at a steady level to provide stability for our ranchers.
- e. Grazing should be eliminated wherever vegetative health is an issue. A comprehensive review of range health and management is necessary.

### **VII. *Many who commented spoke of issues related to processes and effects that are outside the scope of the Phase II Amendment because existing policy, law, or decisions already cover these concerns.***

- a. Current and developing water-quality problems should be identified to ensure future water quality.
  - Forest-wide water quality direction is adequately addressed in the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan, except as it applies to viability.





- b. All roadless areas of more than 1,000 acres should be protected. All roadless areas of 160 acres and larger should be fully preserved.
  - A forest-wide roadless area decision was made in the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan.
- c. Future road construction should be prohibited while obliterating unnecessary roads and limiting off-road vehicle use, both on- and off-trail, to lesson negative impacts on other recreationists and wildlife.
  - Forest transportation direction is adequately addressed in the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan.

***VIII. Several groups and individuals provided comments on alternatives to be considered. Some of these comments were within the scope of the Phase II Amendment, and others were not.***

Alternatives within the scope of the Phase II Amendment include the following:

- a. Phase I direction could be used as an alternative.
- b. Alternative G will meet the intent of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the need for additional species viability analysis; therefore, it should be considered the preferred alternative unless a more aggressive alternative is developed in regard to forest health.
- c. An alternative based on the Settlement Agreement would provide for protection of imperiled wildlife species during ground-disturbing activities.

Alternatives outside the scope of the Phase II Amendment include the following:

- a. Use a restoration alternative for the entire Forest as years of logging, road building, mining, and livestock grazing have left the Forest ecosystem in an incredibly imperiled condition.
  - The 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan determined the overall mix of multiple uses on the Black Hills National Forest. A restoration alternative would be outside the scope of the 1997 decision.
- b. Unexpected natural disasters and unexpected consequences of management activities could cause aggregate impacts with highly significant ecological consequences; therefore, contingency plans should be developed.
  - Contingency planning is more appropriate for a site-specific project, not for a programmatic Forest Plan. Forest Plan monitoring is designed to discover when unexpected consequences are occurring.
- c. Provide a free roaming bison alternative in which the Oglala Sioux Tribe manages the bison.
  - This alternative would not address any of the decisions to be made for the Phase II Amendment. Bison are not a sensitive species, nor a species of local concern.



*March 2003  
Draft EIS Available  
for Public Review*

*June 2003  
End of Public  
Comment Period*

*October 2003  
Final EIS Complete*

*November 2003  
Record of Decision*



# Phase II Amendment

of the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan

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## Decision Framework/ Scope of the Decision

Based on the purpose and need and public input, the Phase II Amendment will consider the following significant Land and Resource Management Plan areas of concern:

1. **Viability and Diversity** – Whether and how LRMP goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and monitoring will be changed to assure viability and diversity of species on the Black Hills National Forest
2. **Research Natural Areas** – Whether and where additional Research Natural Areas will be established on the BHNF.
3. **Suitable Timber Lands** – The BHNF has significantly improved the information available to evaluate timber suitability. Vegetation cover and condition typing is more accurate, as is growth-and-yield information. Public demand to reduce fire, insect, and disease risk has increased. Timber suitability is a key factor in determining harvest levels and the ability to manage vegetation. Given these refinements, the Forest will reassess timber suitability as part of the Phase II Amendment.
4. **Deer and Elk Habitat Direction** – Whether and how goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and monitoring for deer and elk will be changed.
5. **Outputs** – Whether and by how much output objectives in Chapter 1 of the 1997 LRMP will be changed as a result of decision framework items 1 through 4 and large fires since the 1997 LRMP.

## Large Burn Areas

According to the assessment of public scoping comments, post-fire activities received much attention, particularly management of recent burns such as the Jasper Fire. Large-burn-area issues have been reviewed, and the Forest has determined these issues will not be addressed in the Phase II Amendment for the following reasons:

- Phase II is a forest-plan-amendment process. Changing management-area designations is more appropriately handled in a Forest Plan Revision, and, except for considering RNAs, will not be addressed in the Phase II Amendment. The next Forest Plan Revision is scheduled for 2012.

- The current 1997 Black Hills Forest Plan has ample direction to reduce fire-and-insect risks.
- Many of the concerns over post-fire management involve how-to direction needed to accomplish a given result. The Forest Plan should generally not include how-to direction but rather describe desired conditions and limitations on management activities to prevent adverse effects. How-to direction is more appropriately included in a Forest handbook supplement completed separately from the Phase II Amendment.

## Developing Alternatives

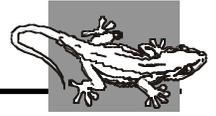
The next step in preparing the Phase II Amendment is developing alternatives that address the decisions to be made and to resolve the issues.

## Criteria for Evaluating Alternatives

Evaluation criteria are used to examine possible alternatives to see if they meet the purpose and need of the Amendment. They are important to keeping the process focused on the basic purpose of the Amendment. To be considered in detail for the Phase II Amendment, an alternative must meet the following criteria:

- Comply with the National Forest Management Act and regulations.
- Be compatible with the unchanged portions of the 1997 Revised Forest Plan.
- Help address the five decision framework items listed above.
- Provide a balanced approach to managing the multiple resources and uses of Black Hills National Forest.
- Be technically, socially, and economically practical and feasible.





## Preparation for Alternative Development

The Forest has conducted a number of assessments to provide data about the resources that are the subject of the Amendment. The results of the following assessments will provide a foundation for the alternatives:

- Assessment of 513 plant and animal species to develop a final list of Species of Local Concern.
- Assessment of Management Indicator Species (MIS) – species that serve as a barometer for species viability at the Forest level – and development of associated monitoring and documentation.
- Development of management approaches for all Emphasis Species – species categorized as Threatened, Endangered, Sensitive, MIS, or as Species of Local Concern.
- Identification of potential areas to be designated as RNAs. A total of 121 areas are being screened to identify candidate RNAs.
- Reassessment of areas identified as suitable for timber production, in order to ensure that the Allowable Sale Quantity is accurate and provides for a sustainable timber harvest.
- Reassessment of management direction for deer and elk considering new research and standards and guidelines that are independent of computer model outputs.

## You Can Participate in Alternative Development

Alternative development is another opportunity for your involvement. Having set a foundation through the assessments, the Forest now needs your help to ensure that the alternatives reflect the range of interests of the people. The Forest will be hosting a series of open houses to provide more detailed information about the issues and resources under consideration and invite your input on alternatives. Information about these open houses is provided on the first and last pages of this newsletter. Meetings will also be held with other federal, state, and local government agencies.

After the open houses, the Black Hills National Forest will review all the inputs and, using the evaluation criteria, identify a set of alternatives. Those alternatives will be analyzed in detail in the Draft EIS. The Draft EIS will also include the alternative selected in the 1997 Revised Forest Plan (“Alternative G”), as modified by the Phase I Amendment Decision Notice.

A range of alternatives will be developed by October 2002.

## How Best to Comment

Your input is important to the alternative development process. The more specific your suggestions are, the more helpful they will be to us. Following are some suggestions for preparing effective comments:

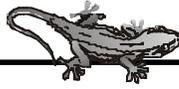
- Attend one of the public meetings and become acquainted with the issues.
- Focus on the purpose of the Phase II Amendment. Consider information provided
  - at the meetings
  - in this newsletter
- Submit written comments at one of the meetings or by mail. If you mail your comments, please make sure they are postmarked no later than September 16, 2002.
- Format your suggestions so that they explain what you would like to see in an alternative and why it should be there. Include information to support your reasoning.

The Forest Service will not focus on issues that:

- Are outside the scope of the proposed action (scope of the decision/decision framework), or
- Are already decided by law, regulation, Forest Plan, or other higher level decision, or
- Are irrelevant to the decision to be made, or
- Are conjectural and not supported by scientific evidence.

Written comments may be sent to:

**Attn: Jeff Ulrich**  
**Phase II Amendment**  
**Black Hills National Forest**  
**25041 North Highway 16**  
**Custer, SD 57730**



## Come to an Open House to Provide Input on Alternatives

Four open houses have been scheduled to provide more information about the Phase II Amendment and to receive your input on alternatives to be considered in the Draft EIS. Please mark your calendar and plan to attend. Work stations staffed by BHNF personnel will be available through the afternoon and evening. An area for collecting your written comments is also planned. In addition, a Forest Service spokesperson will provide a brief summary of the process and decisions to be made. Those summaries will be presented at 3, 5:30, and 7 p.m. Come when you wish and stay as long as you like.

### The open houses will be from 3 to 8 p.m. at:

**Rapid City, SD**                      **September 9, 2002**  
Ramkota Conference Center, 2111 N. LaCrosse St.  
**Spearfish, SD**                      **September 10, 2002**  
Northern Hills Ranger District, 2014 N. Main St.  
**Sundance, WY**                      **September 12, 2002**  
4-H Exhibit Hall, Fairgrounds Loop Rd.  
**Custer, SD**                      **September 13, 2002**  
BHNF Supervisor's Office, 25041 N. Hwy 16

*Come Share Your Ideas!*

## The Website

Go to Internet website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/fp/planning/99Amend/Amend.htm> to view BHNF Forest Plan Amendment documents.

## Mailing List

Individuals and groups that have traditionally received this type of information in the mail will continue to be on the mailing list. Anyone wishing to be added to or deleted from the list may do so by contacting Peggy Woodward at 605-673-9263 or e-mail at [pwoodward@fs.fed.us](mailto:pwoodward@fs.fed.us).

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