Appendix

A

BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST

Final Environmental Impact Statement
for the
Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Issues, Concerns, Opportunities

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Appendix A

Introduction

Public involvement is crucial to forest plan revision. National Forest Management Act (NFMA) regulation 219.6(c) states public involvement activities shall be used early and often throughout the development of a forest plan. The Code of Federal Regulations 219.6(b) states that public involvement in the preparation of draft and final environmental impact statements shall conform to the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and its associated implementing regulations. The National Environmental Policy Act requires federal agencies to conduct public involvement and provide opportunities for public comment.

The Bighorn National Forest has conducted an active schedule of diverse public involvement opportunities spanning the revision process, including publication of the Notice of Intent to Revise the Plan in the Federal Register, public meetings, open houses, field trips, speaking engagements, newsletters, meetings with interested stakeholders, our interactive website, and everyday "open door policy" public contact.

The National Forest Management Act prescribes a 10-step planning process. The first step is to identify and evaluate public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities (CFR 219.12(b)). Regulatory direction is augmented and clarified in Forest Service Handbook 1090.12, Section 4.19(a). This appendix describes the process used and the results of that step. The following topics are included:

- Identifying Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities.
- Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities.
- Consultation with Others.

Identifying Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities

The forest plan revision Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) utilized a variety of public participation activities over the course of the revision process to evaluate and identify public issues related to the revision of the Land and Resource Management Plan for the Forest. The following is a chronology of public involvement activities:

In the early 1990s, the Bighorn National Forest began a significant amendment to the 1985 Forest Plan in order to rectify discrepancies between the Allowable Sale Quantity and the Standards/Guidelines. Over the course of about 4 years, a Draft Amended Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement were published, with the attendant public

involvement and analysis. The Final Amended Plan and Environmental Impact Statement were printed, but the Record of Decision was never finalized. The Regional Forester decided to wait for the "impending" forest plan revision, rather than make the amendment decision. The original issues and scope of analysis described in the Notice of Intent were largely developed from the public involvement and analysis that occurred with this effort.

On November 10, 1999, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed Action was published in the Federal Register. Publication of the NOI in the Federal Register formally initiated the revision process. The responses to the NOI were analyzed, and minor adjustments to the issues stated in the NOI were made.

In October 2000, the ID Team met with representatives from State of Wyoming, and the county commissioners and conservation districts from the four-county Bighorn National Forest area. The purpose was to initiate a community-based revision with representatives from those entities as the primary contacts for what became the Steering Committee. Since that meeting, the Steering Committee has met more than 35 times. The entities listed above are cooperating agencies for revision.

Between November 2000 and January 2001, the Forest conducted six meetings in communities near the Bighorn National Forest to discuss the NOI and discuss issues. Meetings were held in Sheridan, Worland, Buffalo, Greybull, Lovell, and Gillette; over 300 people attended. The counties and conservation districts served as hosts for the meetings.

In July and August 2001, field trips on the north and south ends of the Forest were held. How the Revised Plan would address the issues was the primary topic. Approximately 80 people attended.

In January 2003, the Forest, counties and conservation districts held six meetings in the towns listed above to report back to people on how the issues raised during scoping led to the development of six alternatives to be analyzed in detail for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Over 300 people attended these meetings. About 25,000 newspaper inserts describing the revision process to date, the alternatives, and the meetings were distributed in the communities where meetings were held. The Regional Forester reviewed and approved alternatives for analysis in February.

In July 2003, the Forest held a field trip in the Burgess Junction area, and discussed the status of the analysis. About 40 people attended.

In December 2003, the ID Team prepared an Initial Effects Analysis for the steering committee and a few other interested citizens who inquired about copies. The steering committee reviewed these documents, and met for five days with the Revision ID team to make comments and edits to the alternatives, goals/objectives, standards/guidelines, and desired conditions.

In July, 2004, the Draft Revised Plan and DEIS were released for a 90-day public comment period. Six public meetings were held in Gillette, Sheridan, Buffalo, Worland, Greybull, and Lovell within the first month of the comment period. The objective of the

meetings was to explain the documents and how to comment. Four public comment meetings were held in late September in Greybull, Worland, Buffalo, and Sheridan. Over 18,000 written comments were submitted during the comment period.

Nine forest planning newsletters or newspaper inserts were published to convey planning information and invite public comment. The first was published in November 2000, preceding the initial round of scoping public meetings. Primary newsletter content has been in explaining the revision process, informing people of upcoming meetings or field trips, and reporting meeting results.

The Bighorn National Forest website has been updated with many revision items, and this has been the primary vehicle used to keep non-local residents informed. Newsletters, meeting minutes, draft documents, copies of alternative maps, the geographic area and forest wide assessments, and the analysis of the management situation are posted on the website.

A comprehensive Public Involvement Plan guides public involvement in the forest plan revision process. Its objectives are listed below:

1. To address a complex scientific, economic, and social situation with technical competence and have an involved citizenry.
2. To create an image in peoples minds, internally and externally, of the difference/integration of scientific "answers" to managerial questions that are ultimately value based.
3. To recognize that consensus is not possible, given the relatively short time frame and diversity of values and opinions. Rather, our expectation is that people feel they have had a chance to provide input, and feel that their input was considered fairly.
4. To recognize that public involvement is not just a NEPA requirement but is ultimately the only way to be able to make value-based choices between alternatives. Take advantage and recognize the scientific, technical, and value information that the public has to offer.
5. To integrate the concept of adaptive management into the planning process.
6. To establish and maintain credibility and foster understanding of the agency and land and resource management planning.

Throughout the revision process, members of the forest plan ID Team and the Forest Supervisor met with individuals and organizations by phone and in person to discuss the planning process, issues, and alternatives. In addition, area newspapers covered the revision and published news releases, articles, and revision-related letters from citizens.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities – Major Revision Issues

These issues were considered major because changes in management may affect a large land area, affect outputs, or make important changes in resource conditions. Most importantly, these are the issues that past monitoring has indicated will have different legal and sustainable potential solutions that are supported by different people and groups. Selection of the correct solution will involve public opinion and a decision-maker choice. These issues drove the development of alternatives.

Biological and Habitat Diversity

Public opinions varied on the desired amount of old growth forests; habitat management of sensitive species; the role and management of wildfire, insects, and disease; and population viability of native and desired non-native species.

Timber Suitability and Management of Forested Lands

Some members of the public wanted fewer acres designated for timber production; others wanted an increase in acres designated for timber production. Some people wanted to maintain the current level or increase the use of clearcutting in forest types such as aspen and lodgepole pine, while others wanted clearcutting eliminated entirely from the Forest.

Recreation and Travel Management

Public input focused on motorized recreation opportunities. Some wanted fewer miles of open motorized summer routes and more opportunities for quiet recreation in summer and winter; others wanted the Forest to add trails for off-road vehicle use.

Roadless/Wilderness

Opinions varied in the amount of roadless area to recommend for wilderness designation and how much of the remaining inventoried roadless area should retain roadless character.

Special Areas

Members of the public expressed divergent views on the miles of rivers to be recommended as inclusions to the Wild and Scenic Rivers system and how many new Research Natural Areas and Special Interest Areas should or should not be recommended. There was discussion on how large the Medicine Wheel area should be.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities – Other Revision Topics

Other revision topics represented need for change, but they were not urgent enough to be categorized as amendment topics or would not drive the development of alternatives. These topics generally include out-of-date forest plan direction and could best be updated with revised standards and guidelines. These issues were used when developing standards and guidelines and when conducting the effects analysis for the FEIS.

- **Minerals management**- While current locatable minerals extraction is low on the forest, the standards and guidelines were updated to insure the most current resource protection measures are in place.
- **Community Effects –** There was considerable interest and concern in how the Revised Plan projected outputs and direction would affect the local society and the economy. Some people felt that it would be desirable to establish some base level of grazing and timber outputs to support the local economy.
- **Land ownership adjustment**- There is concern that there is not enough access to the Bighorn National Forest in particular areas.
- **Soil and water resource management**- Potentially adverse effects from management activities and some recreation uses is a concern. Standards and guidelines incorporating Best Management Practices were included.
- **Monitoring and evaluation**- Concern has been expressed over the effectiveness of current monitoring activities, lack of data for some resources and costs.
- **Livestock grazing**- A variety of potentially adverse impacts from livestock grazing, and to the livestock industry, have been identified. These include impacts to rangeland vegetation, forage availability for wildlife, and impacts to riparian and water quality. Concerning the health of the livestock industry, people were concerned that grazing reductions on the National Forest could force some ranchers out of business, with the associated concern for additional open space loses. The Revised Plan defines goals, standards and guidelines and monitoring protocols which will provide guidance for allotment planning (project level work). The revision analysis assessed areas of suitable and capable range. Allotment planning will set seasons of use, rotations, fencing, and water improvements, etc. Livestock grazing is a recognized use of the National Forest.

Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities Not Addressed in the Revision

Some public concerns were not addressed in the forest plan revision. Some are best addressed by other agencies. Other concerns may be matters of project implementation or are outside the scope of forest planning.

- Quality environmental education.
- Level of signing.
- Administration of special use permits.
- Law enforcement.
- Animal damage management
- Global warming
- Hunting
- Wolf and grizzly reintroduction
- Livestock grazing fees
- Aerial spraying of noxious weeds
- Forest Service staffing and budget
- Grazing fees
- Permit system for Cloud Peak Wilderness
- Restroom facilities on Highway 16
- Road maintenance standards
- Individual route (road and trail) decisions

Consultation with Others

As described previously and required by law, consultation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies spanned the revision process. Specific consultations include the following:

Bighorn Plan Revision Steering Committee – The Steering Committee includes representatives from the Forest Service (Regional Office specialists, District Rangers, the Forest Supervisor and Staff Officers, and the Wyoming Statewide Coordinator); the Governor's Planning Office and other state agencies; County Commissioners, and Conservation District board members. The Steering Committee assisted the Revision Team by offering strategic advice and expertise and providing input into the direction and alternatives. The more than 35 Steering Committee meetings were open to the public, although the general public's participation was limited to questions and when they were called upon by steering committee members.

Tribal – The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (16 U.S.C. 470, Section 106, 36CFR800) requires that federally recognized Indian tribes be consulted on the potential adverse effects to cultural resources on every undertaking that an agency plans. Federal and Forest Service policy (FSM 1563) directs the Forest Service to maintain a governmental relationship with federally recognized tribal governments. In early 2001, the Bighorn National Forest Supervisor sent letters to 21 tribal governments requesting involvement in the Bighorn National Forest plan revision on a government-to-government basis. Tribal representatives participating in the annual Medicine Wheel meeting have been informed of the status of the revision process annually since 1999. Forest personnel have had personal meetings with leaders from the Arapaho, Northern Cheyenne, Crow, and Shoshone tribal councils.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service – The Bighorn National Forest conducted on-going Level I and Level II consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for potential effects on listed species.

Wyoming Rural Development Council Community Assessments – Bighorn National Forest personnel participated on or were team leaders for rural community assessments in:

- Worland
- Tensleep
- Buffalo
- Kaycee
- Lovell
- Ranchester/Dayton
- Greybull

Agency and Local Government Involvement – Bighorn NF personnel consulted a variety of elected officials and local, state, and federal government agencies. Contacts included:

- Local representatives for U.S. Senators Craig Thomas and Mike Enzi
- Local representatives for U.S. Congresswoman Barbra Cubin
- National Park Service, Bighorn Canyon Recreation Area
- National Historic Trails Office
- BLM State Office, Cheyenne
- BLM Buffalo and Cody Field Office
- BLM Worland Area Office
- Environmental Protection Agency – Region 8
- USDA – APHIS (Animal Damage Control)
- Federal Highway Administration
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

- Bureau of Indian Affairs – Crow Agency, MT
- Sheridan County Commissioners and Planner
- Johnson County Commissioners
- Washakie County Commissioners and Planner
- Big Horn County Commissioners
- Sheridan County Conservation District
- Lake DeSmet and Powder River Conservation Districts
- South Big Horn County and Shoshone Conservation Districts
- Washakie Conservation District
- State of Wyoming
  - Governor's Planning Office
  - Wyoming State Forestry
  - Wyoming Game and Fish
  - Department of Environmental Quality
  - State Parks and Historic Sites
  - State Historic Preservation Officer
  - State Trails
  - Department of Agriculture
  - Department of Transportation
  - Wyoming Business Council

Public Involvement in the Bighorn Forest Plan Revision

The range of alternatives analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement represented the broad spectrum of opinions on major issues identified by the public in many venues, including at least 46 scheduled public meetings, numerous informal meetings and phone conversations, mail, and email. Public input was sought and welcomed throughout the revision process. The outcome is a Revised Plan in which citizens have had a chance to provide input. Our hope is that citizens can see the impact of their involvement on the Revised Plan.