National Forest Service, Forest Plan Revision
Preliminary "Need To Change" January workshops
Public Input Report
Sierra National Forest Public Workshop
January 27, 2014

Prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy

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Introduction

The Sierra National Forest (SNF) Public Workshop regarding the Forest Plan Revision preliminary "Need to Change" was held on January 27 at the Holiday Inn Fresno Airport in Fresno, CA. Based on sign-in records, at least 93 members of the public attended.

The meeting opened with a welcome from Sierra Forest Supervisor Dean Gould. The agenda included presentations, discussion, and questions and answers regarding Forest Plan Revision, the preliminary "Need to Change" document, desired conditions for the Forest, and the unique roles and contributions of the Forest. The presenters were members of the Regional Planning Team Deb Whitall, Acting Director of Planning for Forest Service Region 5; Jo Ann Fites-Kaufman, Ecologist, U.S. Forest Service; Mary Cole, Landscape Architect, Sequoia National Forest; and Mark Metcalfe, Economist, U.S. Forest Service. Members of the public were also provided with opportunities to interact with Regional and Sierra Forest staff and each other during an "open house" and small group discussion tables. The meeting closed with final remarks from Supervisor Gould. Meeting materials and presentations are posted to the Region 5 Planning website: http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r5/landmanagement/planning.

The purpose of this report is to assemble public input received during the workshop, either verbally (as captured by staff note-takers) or on comment cards. Comments sent via email or post before or after the workshop will be assembled in a separate report.

Input by topic area

Input received at the Sierra Public Workshop is organized by the 5 topic areas from the preliminary "Need to Change", plus a category for "other / overarching" input. Within each section, comments are subdivided as either **refinements** to the Need to Change, **clarifications** of text in the Need to Change, "**missing**" from the Need to Change, statements of **desired conditions** for the Forest, or

project / activity specific input. Subcategories in each topic area are only listed if input pertaining to that subcategory was received.

Thirteen written comment cards were received at this meeting. Remarks from the comment cards are shown in quotation marks; diverse ideas submitted on a single comment card may appear in different topic areas as appropriate. All other input is derived from notes taken by Forest Service staff and the meeting facilitator.

This report was prepared by the Center for Collaborative Policy with the intent to neutrally categorize and summarize the input generated at the workshop.

1. Vegetation, resilience, wildlife and fire

Refinements

- "Burn it so it doesn't burn!"
- "Resilience means 'staying the same' (but) adaptive capacity against climate change, invasives, and growing population makes more sense. More emphasis on fire and hand- thinning in riparian areas to encourage riparian vegetation. Timber stocking rates need to be reduced and addressed in the vegetation emphasis. How are meadows being targeted for restoration?"
- Need to manage the fuel better.
- Thinning the forest would give a tremendous benefit. Thin forests are more manageable forests.
- Need to re-introduce fire, let the fires burn to benefit wildlife and it would also take care of other areas. Rather than focusing on putting them out. Develop a tool to decide whether to let it burn or put it out.
- Put more money and efforts into fire management, prescribed burning, to prevent intense fires instead of just coping and managing after the fact.
- Be more thorough with prescribed burning, not enough just to thin and only burn once. Would recommend going in for a 2nd burn to clean up what was thinned.
- Transition objectives slowly to that allow the wildlife, fishers, to adjust. Work with the biologists to obtain a greater understanding.
- Concentrate mechanical thinning to areas where there are heavy wildlife populations.
- Manage more intensely in areas where there aren't heavy wildlife populations and a little more precisely around sensitive wildlife areas.
- Manage around heavy or frequented recreation areas.
- Burn to not burn, either spend the money now or pay it later.
- More clearing of ROW's to prevent fires from spreading.

- Evaluate cultural as well as ecological restoration benefits of fire use.

Desired conditions

- "Thin the forest- come up with a desired trees per acre – we are going to burn up. Log, log, log – jobs, jobs, jobs – we can do it without hurting the forest."
- Think about integrated ecological perspectives instead of managing for solely aesthetic objectives. Targets might be the same but for different reasons. If you are managing for aesthetics base it on data not just on what you think people want. For example, in the Sequoia NP they manage single trees because they believe the public want them to look "pretty" but it's not based on any data.
- 1,000 acres of high severity would be a comfortable range; High severity fire has value. More prescribed burns, over bigger areas, and a larger range of severity.
- Lower stocking rates for logging projects to prevent re-crowding forests, including more hardwood because of their wildlife values.
- No more Round-up (herbicide)! Manage weeds with fire instead.
- More salvaged logging.
- It's a good idea to designate places in the forest set aside to stop a fire if it got started in a lower elevation and was moving to higher elevation.
- Allow discretion of fire management to allow beneficial fires in right time/place/circumstances.

Project / activity specific input

- "Since the USDA owns the Smokey the Bear image and message, perhaps it is time to change his message. Kids love Smokey the Bear. Use him to teach children (and their parents) that fires are a valued part of the ecosystem, and while we still must prevent unplanned fires, Smokey is part of the crew that goes out and manages prescribed fires that prevent the big and damaging fires."
- Map designated areas to distinguish different types of burn areas, crown fire areas versus other types of fires.
- Prepare the public for not being able to meet objectives, prepare them for loss. More fire education and being honest about possible outcomes; realistic expectations for the public to understand. Inform the public on the benefits of fire.

2. Wildland Urban Interface

Desired Conditions

- “Need to develop integrated fuels management plans that incorporate efforts that remove fuels in defensible polygons near WUI in order to protect lives, properties, and infrastructure to prevent [more] Rim Fires.”
- Better strategy around burn windows / fire in general.
- Fresno county ordinances and enforcement for preparation, not only disaster plans.
- Need better coordination between counties to balance between Tulare, Kings and Fresno.
- Uniform national USDA Forest Service message regarding fire use / prevention in WUI / suppression. The Forest Service currently has two websites with two very different intents. Which intent are we to represent in our local area?

Project / activity specific input

- Coming out of Oakhurst (Nelder Grove), a “no touch area” with built up fuels – worried about fire damage with climate change and current conditions.
- If the FS did better at public info on fire – more opportunity. We need to improve social understanding and acceptance of fire, through education and experience. FS needs to understand the community involved, e.g. retirees, families, etc. People have a big disconnect with nature; it’s a literacy problem.
- Often, impacts of smoke are perceived in the wrong way.
- How can we build stronger partnerships with organizations that can help with interpretation? People don’t know who FS is – FS lacks leadership.
- Need better media coverage.

3. Meadows

Refinements

- Conifer encroachment is a concern (brought up frequently).
- Concerned about wildlife restoration plans.
- Meadows are high value limited resources. Priority projects/problem areas need to be addressed. Watersheds / improvement needs.
- How do we select our meadows for restoration? Is it based on an assessment of vulnerability to climate change? What are the criteria we use to prioritize meadow restoration efforts?
- Drought is an issue.

- Implementation and funding is a concern.
- Use a holistic approach – ties in within resilient forest area.
- Climate change should be recognized as criteria; it can be catastrophic if usage is mismanaged.
- Concern with culverts taking away from meadow – are there any other ways? FS needs to keep up on culvert inventory so we know where problem areas are if funding becomes available.
- Tribal use of meadows is important. Tribes are noticing a decrease in grasses needed for cultural uses, which makes them worry about the future of the meadow.

Desired Conditions

- Fewer trees and less encroachment.
- Better culverts/ round-abouts.
- Optimum water.
- Meadow conditions monitoring.
- Monitoring of other species using meadows (insects, etc).
- Want some meadows to be preserved without management (no recreation, no stock/grazing allowed)

Project / activity specific input

- Whiskey Falls is a very special place for tribal members. Feels like site is neglected and not maintained. Need to preserve special areas.

4. Aquatic and Riparian

Refinements

- "Riparian and meadows need to be managed – they are dynamic. Management may include doing something to maintain them at desired conditions."
- Concerns about restoration after a fire, what is the policy for restoring these areas (example was the Bear Dome fire near Florence)? How do we deal with erosion?
- Concerns regarding risk of spread of invasive species entering Sequoia Kings (SEKI) National Park from adjacent Forest Service (Sierra, Inyo and Sequoia NFs) through riparian corridors. An example is velvet grass coming into SEKI from Kern River. Need to consider recreation use between the Park and Forest boundaries.

Missing

- How would mountain yellow-legged frog listing affect management?

Desired Conditions

- Want to see native species.

5. Sustainable Recreation

Refinements

- Need to explore other ways to raise income, e.g. federal/state law changed – credit program to generate funds.
- We've continued to lose opportunities over last 40-50 years, e.g. closure of stations. Would like to see that restored.
- Concern that additional wilderness will limit recreation opportunities.
- Concerned with USFWS restrictions on toads and frogs. People are more important than frogs and toads. Want recreation opportunities.
- Private property owners don't think their grandkids will get to see the land. They fear their access will be taken away. They have run into many restrictions, markers have been changed.

Clarifications

- "Would like to know how trail maintenance fits into the overall plan. Many trails are unmarked and not kept open denying access to the wilderness and historic areas."
- Need to figure out what a sustainable system is. Renewal is one aspect. Other aspects need to be defined.

Missing

- Infrastructure should be an emphasis area.

Desired conditions

- "Sierra NF needs to address potential conflict between motorized and non-motorized recreation in the winter. FS needs to create separate areas for the two groups for the benefit of both. The goal should be to achieve equal opportunities."
- Compatibility between use OHV, mountain bikers, horse backing, hikers etc and enough space for diverse uses
- Need a planned system for mountain bikers. When people are happy with the system, they don't range beyond it.
- Roads should be dealt with at the landscape level vs. project by project. Issue with economic sustainability. Revision will be made if this is not addressed.

- Channel heavy uses to certain routes to minimize damage, and have less impacting uses in other areas.
- Places on the forest have been closed. Be careful intensifying use in more limited areas causing overuse due to closure of opportunities.
- Traffic in these drought conditions - think about limiting our footprint because environmental is fragile.

Project / activity specific input

- "Season of use dates for roads in record of decision should be flexible depending on conditions – not calendar. Also needs enforcement. There are many users ignoring the closed period."
- Need continued education on sharing safe trails and maintaining trails.
- Some trails are not good to share at some areas (For example, San Joaquin River Gorge is too dangerous).
- Fire people need to work with recreation people e.g. closure of Mammoth Pool for a month really hurt and may have been excessive.
- Conflicts between "historic site" – can't change bathroom but site is being damaged, water pollution, public health and safety. Granite Creek – need to find way to improve historical area.
- Water recreation is limited.
- Recreation is for the public. Regulations eliminate public use and alienate people who use the forest.
- More people going to forest that don't respect the forest. Need for management and education. We love the forest to death. Higher usage of forest. Educate people on sustainable use so the forest is still enjoyable.
- Cultural diversity has changed dynamic of use. There needs to be education related to leave no trace and leave it as you found it.
- Use of resources is important. People who use the Forest become the voice support the existence of the Forest.
- Concern that conditions are worsening such that going to a favorite spot is not sustainable.
- Off-Highway Vehicle use should be managed not regulated. It belongs to the people. Ron Good is a great person to work with in regards to this, historic harvesting, etc.

6. Other / Overarching

- "Several key issues were missing from the preliminary NTC, including: designated areas (there should be an accurate and complete assessment for wilderness and WFL and RWOC designators). Roads

and infrastructure (I understand that the TAP is a stand-alone document and currently underway. However this needs to completed and included in the revised LRMP) roadless areas (proper and citizens inventory assessment should be conducted). At-risk species assessment and desired condition statement needs to be included in the revised markups. Desired conditions for meadows and riparian/stream systems need to be established based on complete analysis of high quality references. Monitoring plans need to be established and implemented to properly assure that sites are meeting condition requirements."

- "I would like to know if there is a member on the inter-disciplinary team whose expertise is water management for Sierra and Sequoia forests and how to reach that person. Are there any "preliminary needs for change" dealing with water management? If so, what are they? If not, what are current water management policies for both Sierra and Sequoia?
- "Dinkey creek collaborative needs to be implemented."
- "I appreciate the presentations. My concern is a secure funding source to accomplish the plan. The forest service has been under funded for decades. How can we help to secure the needed funds?"
- "In all emphasis area please, please, please make sure that access for people is preserved. For example, when the elderly can no longer hike in the forest, make sure there is access via whatever means are necessary (4-wheel vehicles). Do not place the welfare of plants and animals above people's ability to enjoy the forest. Preserve areas and recreation for specific needs i.e. boaters (loud motors)."
- "Please try not to use race as a need to change. The forest makes us all equal – we are Americans – we have American forests. If you pick certain race over others, you just move us apart."
- Integrated objectives need to be married together for various resources.
- Want things to remain open for children and grand children. Families have grown up in mountains. Family heritage.

Conclusion / Major Themes

Attendees at this Sierra Public Workshop provided numerous specific suggests at both a Forest Plan level and a project / activity specific level. Attendees largely supported sensitive managed fire and forest thinning. Public education around fire and sustainable recreation was a recurring theme. Discussions exposed the tension between preserving special places, supporting recreation, and ensuring user access in general – especially regarding listed species and wilderness areas. Commenters raised several issues that they see as significant gaps in the preliminary Need to Change, including water management, wilderness

designations, roads and infrastructure, and at-risk species assessments.