

Inyo, Sequoia, and Sierra National Forests Need to Change Analysis

WHAT DOES THIS DOCUMENT DO?

This document provides: (1) a description of components requiring update to current forest management plans; and (2) other recommended changes to current forest management plans. Identifying the need to change (NTC) gives focus to the planning process (36 CFR 219.7(c)(2)(c)i)). It clearly articulates which existing plan components need to be revised, and what new plan components need to be developed.

HOW IS THIS DOCUMENT ORGANIZED?

Section 1 is a list of requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule that must be addressed during this plan revision. Section 2 lists recommendations for the NTC. Section 3 lists resource areas where changes are not being recommended at this time. A summary of the findings from the “full need to change analysis” and the rationale behind the recommendations will augment this document at a later date. Public and tribal government feedback on the preliminary need to change received in January 2014 was also considered.

SECTION 1: WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE 2012 PLANNING RULE?

The following are required under the 2012 Planning Rule:

- Identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, and determine whether to recommend any such lands for wilderness designation.
- Identify the eligibility of rivers for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, unless a systematic inventory has been previously completed and documented, and there are no changed circumstances that warrant additional review.
- Identify existing designated areas other than the areas identified above and determine whether to recommend any additional areas for designation. If the responsible official has the delegated authority to designate a new area or modify an existing area, then the responsible official may designate such area when approving the plan, plan amendment, or plan revision.
- Identify the maximum quantity of timber that may be removed from the plan area.
- The Regional Forester shall identify the species of conservation concern for the plan area in coordination with the responsible official.
- Every plan must have management areas or geographic areas or both.
- Every plan must include the following plan components:
 - Desired conditions

- Objectives
 - Standards
 - Guidelines
 - Suitability of lands, which includes identifying areas not suitable for timber production.
- The set of plan components must meet the requirements in the 2012 Planning Rule for social, economic, and ecological sustainability, plant and animal diversity, multiple use and timber.
 - Every plan must also:
 - Identify watersheds that are a priority for maintenance or restoration,
 - Describe the plan area's distinctive roles and contributions within the broader landscape,
 - Include a monitoring program as defined in the rule, and
 - Contain information reflecting proposed and possible actions that may occur on the plan area during the life of the plan, including the planned timber sale program, timber harvesting levels, and the proportion of probable methods of forest vegetation management practices expected to be used.

SECTION 2: WHAT ARE THE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CHANGE?

Last winter, the planning team used a rapid, criteria-based approach to identify six preliminary NTC emphasis areas to present to the public at the January, 2014 meetings. There was input from the public that the process needed to be more transparent and understandable. The planning team then refined their work to yield a more systematic, transparent analysis which identified areas recommended for change.

Plan-wide

- Develop plan components to help guide project-level planning in considering underrepresented populations, and explore more effective communication methods for public outreach.
- Incorporate strategies that prioritize partnerships with tribes to develop programs and implement projects.

Ecological Integrity of Terrestrial Ecosystems

Overall

- Develop desired conditions and plan direction that helps manage for heterogeneity and biodiversity at multiple spatial scales (e.g., landscape, patch or stand and within-patch).
- Incorporate updated science (e.g., PSW GTR 220/237) into management direction to better facilitate restoration.
- Develop plan components to manage for resilient ecosystems to withstand fires, severe drought, ozone and nitrogen emissions, and climate change.
- Add desired conditions and plan direction that addresses habitat connectivity.
- Add plan strategies that emphasize large landscape restoration, including emphasis on cost effective stewardship contracts to improve implementation likelihood.
- Align protection and management strategies and objectives for aquatic and riparian areas with adjacent strategies and objectives for upland areas, particularly in regard to ecological restoration and fire management.
- Add desired conditions for ecological integrity of major non-forest ecosystems (e.g., foothills, shrublands, non-forest), and strategies for prioritizing restoration and to minimize future impacts of climate change to these ecosystems.

Eastside

- Add desired conditions and plan components for ecological integrity of eastside ecosystems, along with strategies to minimize future impacts of climate change to these ecosystems.
- Incorporate updated science on cheatgrass invasion and adaptive management strategies for restoration into plan components.
- Update current management direction to improve coordination with tribes on pinyon pine gathering sites and other areas of importance.

Subalpine and Alpine

- Add restoration strategies for areas that have been impacted by concentrated recreational use that are not addressed in wilderness management plans.

Old Forest and Complex Early Seral Habitats

- Add desired conditions for post-fire management, addressing ecological integrity.
- Update desired conditions to specifically address old forest components and function, such as large tree densities, heterogeneity, understory vegetation, snags, logs, and connectivity at multiple spatial scales.
- Revise current management direction to encourage restoration and maintenance of old forests to a resilient state by emphasizing desired conditions and strategies.

Ecological Integrity of Aquatic and Riparian Ecosystems

- Incorporate strategies to prioritize restoration of aquatic and riparian ecosystems to improve resilience to climate change, fire, ozone, and nitrogen deposition.
- Update plan components for meadows and fens to integrate vegetation condition, soils, hydrologic function, water quality, and biodiversity.

Water

- Update plan components and geographic restoration focus, where needed, to meet or maintain water quality objectives.
- Ensure plan components are aligned with new Forest Service Groundwater Directives.
- Develop strategies and plan components to address trends with water shortages and drought.

Air

- Add or refine plan components to incorporate smoke tradeoff analysis with varied types of restoration projects, including biomass utilization, planned ignitions (prescribed fire and pile burning), and unplanned ignitions (wildfires and wildland fires managed for resource benefits).

Invasive Species

- Add strategies for increasing coordination and collaboration with partners on invasive species management, especially related to monitoring and treatment.
- Add strategies to address prevention of invasion by aquatic invasive plants and animals.
- Ensure plan components are aligned with national policy and guidance on invasive species.

Fire

- Change the plan focus to manage for desired conditions of fire type, severity, frequency and extent, specific to each ecosystem type.
- Include a risk-based fire management approach into the plans that incorporates wildland fires managed for resource benefit, restoration and maintenance of fire in fire adapted ecosystems, and new fire science on how threats to the wildland urban interface are assessed and addressed (fire-adapted communities), and how the zone is defined.

- Update management direction that incorporates the new Federal Wildland Fire Management Policy and the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy to increase the pace and scale of restoration and maintenance, and the effectiveness and efficiency of restoration and maintenance.
- Update plan direction on fire resilience, and restoration and maintenance of fire as an ecosystem process in riparian areas.

Carbon

- Incorporate plan components that address carbon stability through ecological resilience, forest restoration, wood fiber and biomass utilization, and smoke trade-off management.

At-Risk Species

- Consider new information (e.g., PSW GTR 220/237, California Spotted Owl Conservation Assessment, and the Science Synthesis) in developing or updating forest plan components to improve ecological conditions for the California spotted owl.
- Consider new information, recommendations in conservation strategies, and project design criteria in developing plan components that could contribute to the recovery of federally-listed species (including candidates and proposed), such as fisher and three sierran amphibians.
- Develop plan components for at-risk species that support climate change adaptation strategies.
- Update plan components for the Inyo NF to provide for consistency, where applicable, with the Humboldt-Toiyabe forest plan amendment for greater sage-grouse.

Range

- Integrate plan components to reduce overlapping and conflicting management direction for range condition and use and ecological integrity.

Timber

- Ensure plan components encourage economically-viable vegetation management.
- Incorporate plan components that encourage the use of local forest products workforces.

Recreation

- Update Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classes to reflect desired use and any designation or use changes that may have occurred over the years.
- Update plan direction where current guidance is absent or partial, such as to guide the transition of winter resorts to year-round use.
- Develop plan components to focus agency efforts on each forest's recreation roles and contributions to reduce the deferred maintenance backlog.
- Update plan direction to limit or redirect use in areas that are experiencing or are at risk for resource damage.
- Convert from the outdated Visual Management System (VMS) to the Scenery Management System (SMS) to incorporate concepts of sustainable scenic character.
- Incorporate the social and cultural aspects of "place" into forest plans.
- Incorporate strategies for working with partners to adequately protect and manage recreation settings, recreation opportunities, and valued visitor experiences.
- Incorporate guiding principles and goals from the National Framework for Sustainable Recreation into plan direction.

Cultural Resources

- Emphasize a more proactive approach to management of cultural resources by aligning management direction to the National Framework for Sustainable Recreation.

Lands

- Add plan components with management direction for lands acquired by the Inyo NF through the Nevada Enhancement Act.

Wilderness

- Update and fill gaps in management direction for existing and recommended wilderness.

Wild and Scenic Rivers

- For the two newly designated rivers on the Inyo NF that have not yet completed comprehensive river management plans (CRMPs), document outstandingly remarkable values, free flow, and water quality conditions in forest management plans and spatially identify specific outstandingly remarkable values locations within the wild and scenic river corridor. Identify a process and timeframe for finishing CRMPs and developing a final boundary.
- For rivers with existing CRMPs, review and update direction in forest management plans to address gaps or outdated language, and ensure outstandingly remarkable values, free flow, and water quality are protected. Identify a process and timeframe for updating and revising the CRMPs.

Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail

- Define the trail corridor, and ensure that strategies and objectives protect the recreation experience and visual resources.

National Recreation Trails

- Develop plan direction for National Recreation Trails.

SECTION 3: WHAT ARE THE AREAS NOT RECOMMENDED FOR CHANGE?

The list below captures areas of the current plans where change is not being recommended during this revision effort. Current direction will be brought forward into the revised plan. This direction may need to be converted into the required plan components as defined by the 2012 Planning Rule.

Water Quality (other than identified in Section 2)

- Water quality on National Forest System lands is generally good, although some water bodies on national forests are impaired.
- Overall, Forest Service best management practices have been effective; continue improvements through monitoring and adaptive management

Watersheds

- Identifying priority watersheds is a requirement of the 2012 Planning Rule and so will be automatically included in this revision effort (see Section 1).

Soil

- Condition for soils is moderate in most places.
- Existing management direction is adequate to ensure that indicators of soil quality are in an upward trend.

- The majority of areas with soil degradation are a result of legacy impacts and management practices on sensitive soils, for example meadow incision, compaction, and displacement.
- Application of existing management practices and ecological restoration will continue to address legacy impacts.

Energy and Minerals

- Current management direction for transmission corridors appears sufficient.
- Energy development (wind energy, geothermal energy solar energy) is supported by current law and policy and does not require new plan components. Suitability of lands for these uses will be determined during the plan revision process.
- Hydropower operations are in moderate condition. The Forest Service can affect positive environmental restoration through the FERC relicensing process independent of new management direction in forest plans.
- Mining resources on all three forests are in good condition. Active mining claims are appropriately managed. Abandoned mines are being reclaimed as resources allow. Current management direction is sufficient.
- Biomass for energy development is covered under the timber section and a recommendation to encourage wood fiber utilization.

Infrastructure

- The condition and trend of facilities and the transportation system across all three forests is poor. There is a large deferred maintenance backlog. New or changed plan components would not likely affect the condition of transportation and facilities infrastructure. Current management direction carried forward in revised plans can provide the guidance needed to manage road and trail systems for resource protection.
- The current condition of public utilities and private uses is good. Current management direction is sufficient.

Lands (other than identified in Section 2)

- Land ownership patterns are generally in good condition across the three forests. Forest land is relatively consolidated and stable. Land acquisition and exchange is already supported by existing law, regulation, and policy.
- The condition of land status and uses is moderate. Lands are mapped and recorded. Growing population may create more demand to develop private lands within and adjacent to the forests. Increasing demand for recreation opportunities, communication technology, and energy development may influence forest land status and uses in the future.
- Suitability of lands will be determined during the plan revision process, as required by the 2012 Planning Rule (see Section 1).

Designated areas

- Excludes Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers, the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail, and National Recreation Trails, which are recommended for change.
- The condition and trend for other designated areas is moderate to good.
- There is current direction and areas are being managed for their current designations.