

## Revising the Cibola National Forest Land Management Plan – Preliminary Need-to-Change the Existing 1985 Cibola Forest Plan

The conditions, trends, and risks to sustainability reported by the draft *2014 Cibola Forest Assessment Report* for the resources, goods, and services provided by the Cibola will be used in informing the needs-for-change to the *1985 Cibola Forest Plan*. Needs-for-change statements are to be developed collaboratively, both internally and externally, by comparing conclusions on conditions, trends, and risks from the respective topic areas of the assessment, with the plan direction of the 1985 Cibola Forest Plan. The development of needs-for-change statements does not involve wordsmithing of specific plan direction of the 1985 plan; rather, these statements paint a picture of strategic changes necessary to address issues identified in the assessment. The overarching question to be answered in developing needs-for-change statements is “*what strategic current plan direction needs to be revised (added, modified, deleted) to address the conditions, trends, and risks evident from the assessment analyses?*”

Sample needs-for-change have been developed by the Cibola National Forest planning and extended teams, reviewed by line officers, and are now presented to Cibola National Forest users and interested citizens through various media, including most importantly, collaborative work sessions, to be held near each ranger district. At these work sessions, input will be gathered to inform needs-for-change statements that will be ultimately be published in a *Federal Register Notice of Intent* announcement. This announcement conveys that the Cibola will develop a revised forest plan based on identified needs-for-change, and will develop plan alternatives and analyze their respective effects on the human environment. It is hoped that relationships with and among stakeholders will be established or strengthened during the work sessions, information will be shared, and self-convened, self-directed groups will have organized around key issues and bring their ideas and suggestions to the sessions.

Sample, first-draft needs-for-change statements follow.

### **Throughout the Plan**

There is a fundamental need for the revised plan to address how forest management in all resource areas should be prioritized given varying levels of money and personnel likely to be available over the course of the planning cycle. Plans have historically overpromised what could be accomplished, with limited regard for fiscal realities. Yet there is also a desire to keep options open in case unexpected funds and/or capacity become available.

There is a need to reconsider the overall management area scheme used in the 1985 Plan.

- The number, arrangement, boundaries of, and plan direction for the management areas need to be modified to reduce complexity and increase flexibility for restoration and creation of wildlife habitat.
- Changed criteria for management area delineations are needed, including how species indicators are associated with management areas.
- Management area direction needs to reflect realistic expectations regarding the amount of work that can be achieved within a planning cycle.

There is a need for the revised plan to replace tactical, prescriptive language of the 1985 Plan with strategic language, i.e., defining desired conditions for a resource, good, or service, and then identifying quantifiable objectives and project design guidelines and standards to achieve the desired conditions.

There is a need to better recognize and potentially enhance the role of the Cibola National Forest in supporting local economies through both commodity production, including timber and other multiple-use products, and the service-based economy that includes recreation and tourism.

There is a need to include plan direction regarding potential climate change impacts such as increases in drought, wind, storm events, flooding, and other extreme weather.

There is a need to incorporate opportunities for working across boundaries to manage landscapes with adjacent land managers such as state, tribal, and federal partners and other land management entities.

There is a need to remove components from the *1985 Cibola Forest Plan* that are redundant with existing Forest Service Manual (FSM) and Handbook (FSH) direction. Manual and Handbook direction will be incorporated in the revised plan by specific reference only.

## **Need for Change: Ecological/Ecosystems**

### **Restoring Ecosystems and Habitats**

There is a need for the revised plan to define the desired conditions for achieving sustainability and minimizing risks to the Cibola's varied vegetation types and their structure and composition (including snags and downed woody material), and objectives, standards, and guidelines for moving toward the achievement of those desired conditions.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide direction for a fire strategy that allows flexibility in achieving restoration and maintenance of ecosystems while addressing public safety and health concerns.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide direction to promote the achievement and maintenance of satisfactory soil condition, including a decrease in the amount of exposed soil surface, and in areas where deficient, an increase in downed woody material. Priority should be given to Ecological Response Units (ERUs – vegetation types) whose soils have a relatively high proportion in unsatisfactory condition, and of these, especially those ERUs with a preponderance of their context scale (Cibola plan area and surrounding landscape) acreage on the Cibola.

There is a need for the revised plan to include direction to address connectivity corridors and buffer zones for some rare habitats with adjacent or neighboring federal, state, tribal, or private ownerships.

There is a need to provide plan direction to better control the introduction and spread of non-native invasive species on the Cibola, including direction that would minimize the spread of non-native plants that may increase as a result of management activities.

There is a need in the revised plan to update plan direction for prescribed fire management by: incorporating direction that directs an integrated resource approach to prescribed fire activities, and; including direction that allows flexibility for restoration and maintenance of ecosystems while addressing public safety and health concerns.

## **Water**

There is a need for the revised plan to provide plan components to maintain or restore ecological integrity of riparian areas and other water resources features and to establish riparian management zones and around all lakes, perennial and intermittent streams, and open water wetlands, giving special attention to approximately 100 feet from the edges of all perennial streams and lakes.

There is a need in the revised plan to include direction for improving aquatic passage in streams where it is compromised. Direction should be included for restoring and expanding the range of native aquatic species and connectivity of fragmented populations.

On the Cibola, forty-six 12-digit HUC watersheds are rated at risk and one is impaired. There is a need for the revised plan to identify priority watersheds for restoration and focus work in these areas and to utilize the watershed approach when assessing effects to water resource features.

There is a need for plan direction to improve and standardize the process used to manage water rights. Currently, the Forest's approach to water rights is not consistent.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide plan direction for public water supplies and integration with special uses. Direction should consider current and anticipated uses and associated ecological effects.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide direction on the management of the interconnection of groundwater flows with springs, wetlands, riparian areas, and perennial waters to provide favorable conditions of flow for the Forest and maintain the ecosystem characteristics of water dependent resources. For example, many springs are currently developed without consideration of associated groundwater dependent resources. As a result, ecosystems associated with these features have been degraded or lost.

There is a need for the revised plan to include management direction regarding plan area municipal watersheds and groundwater; considering current and anticipated uses, and the anticipated ecological impacts.

## **Air**

There is a need to update plan direction to include elements that ensure that air quality conditions remain in attainment, particularly for criteria pollutants that appear to be in decline, such as particulate matter (e.g., blowing dust).

There is a need for the revised plan to include monitoring elements that provide more reliable information regarding critical loads of atmospheric pollutants.

### **Wildlife Habitat**

There is a need for forest plan components to be developed to maintain and/or restore the ecological conditions necessary to contribute to the recovery of federally listed species, to conserve proposed and candidate species, and to maintain a viable population of each of the species of conservation concern within the plan area.

If ecosystem-targeted plan components are insufficient to provide for the recovery of federally-listed species, the conservation of proposed and candidate species, or the maintenance of viable populations of species of conservation concern, there is a need for the revised plan to include species-specific plan components to provide such ecological conditions in the plan area.

There is a need for management direction in the revised plan to further develop hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching opportunities in the plan area that will provide revenue to the local economies.

## **Needs-for-Change: Multiple Uses and Human Influences**

### **Cultural Resources**

Revised plan direction needs to support evaluation of cultural resource sites after they are located, as well as sustainability of significant sites. When sites are located but not evaluated, ground disturbing activities or uses must be avoided. However, if evaluation indicates the site is not significant, activities and uses may be able to proceed unimpeded. Creative approaches are needed in light of limited capacity for evaluating sites.

The revised plan needs to provide updated direction on the stabilization and preservation of historic structures and traditional cultural properties. The revised plan should also provide direction on the role of heritage sites in economic development.

There is a need for the revised plan to acknowledge and provide management direction for traditional cultural properties and sacred sites while conserving anonymity of such sites where appropriate.

There is a need for the revised plan to modify or eliminate language regarding adverse effects that is inconsistent with 1992 revisions to 36CFR 800, and that compels the Forest to develop a site-specific amendment to the forest plan to allow for adverse effects to non-archeological historic properties.

There is a need for the revised plan to develop program objectives consistent with current program management directives of the 2008 Forest Service Manual revisions.

There is a need for the revised plan to include cultural resource management direction language that is specific to the resources (particularly historic properties) found in each management area. There has been exponentially greater definition of the patterns of historic use in each management area since the 1985 plan, and management direction should be oriented relative to that knowledge. Area-specific management direction should be aligned with current National Register properties, National Historic Landmark properties, and priority heritage assets (PHAs), as well as with known and anticipated National Register eligible historic properties.

There is a need for the revised plan to consider historic and contemporary cultural uses, particularly non-economic uses, for those traditional communities not considered under Tribal Relations (i.e., traditional Hispanic and Anglo communities). In particular, non-site specific and landscape historic and contemporary uses by these communities need to be considered for each management area.

There is a need for the revised plan to include direction that addresses the alignment of heritage resources management objectives (historic properties and landscapes, sacred sites, contemporary uses) with other resource management objectives (particularly but not limited to ecosystem restoration). Other resource management objectives often benefit the sustainable management of cultural resources and uses (and sometimes vice versa), but project design to maximize all benefits could be improved upon.

#### **Areas of Tribal Importance and Tribal Use of Forest Resources**

There is a need for the revised plan to ensure that implementation of Forest programs and activities is consistent with, and fulfills the Federal Government's legally mandated trust responsibilities with Tribes.

There is a need for the revised plan to address contemporary tribal use of forest land and resources, and tribal interests within the plan area. The 1985 Forest Plan does not contain information related to tribal relations or tribal use, interests, or concerns.

There is a need for the revised plan to ensure that direction reflects the recommendations of the 2012 Report to the Secretary of Agriculture – USDA Policy and Procedures Review and Recommendations: Indian Sacred Sites, particularly as it relates to considering the broader concept of “sacred places” in planning efforts.

There is a need for the revised plan to use discretion in land management decisions to find creative ways of incorporating protections for sacred sites in Forest project NEPA decisions, and to give due consideration to accommodating and mitigating for the protection of sacred sites.

There is a need for the revised plan to restrict/prohibit the establishment of new communication sites and expansion of existing communication sites on high places (mountaintops and ridges) that are identified as part of an important cultural landscape by a tribe(s).

There is a need to consider in the planning process the designation of special management areas to aid in the protection of natural and cultural resources important to tribes.

There is a need for the revised plan to support and accommodate, where appropriate, requests for reburial of human remains and cultural items on the Forest, pursuant to agency authority under the provisions of the 2008 Farm Bill (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub L. 110-246, Title VIII, Subtitle B, Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority, Sec. 8103).

There is a need for the revised plan to support and accommodate the collection of forest products for traditional and cultural purposes.

There is a need for the revised plan to clarify the Forest's authority to implement temporary closure orders to ensure privacy for tribes engaged in cultural and ceremonial activities, pursuant to 2008 Farm Bill (Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008, Pub L. 110-246, Title VIII, Subtitle B, Cultural and Heritage Cooperation Authority, Sec. 8104).

There is a need for the revised plan to provide direction that species important to tribes are managed for sustainability.

There is a need for the revised plan to prioritize for acquisition any private land inholdings that possess areas of ecological or cultural importance.

There is a need for the revised plan to encourage opportunities for working across boundaries to manage landscapes and address threats to adjacent tribal resources through the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004; and to meet common objectives identified in Tribe's and Pueblo's land management plans to meet an "all lands" approach to resources management.

There is a need for the revised plan to have the flexibility to facilitate and support tribal minerals and renewable energy development, and the need for transmission across FS lands.

### **Timber Production and Non-timber Forest Products**

There is a need to reconsider which areas of the national forests are available for timber management and potentially set different priorities for when and where timber harvest may occur; facilitating an appropriate level of sustainable timber production.

To support the traditions and culture of American Indian Tribes and other residents of the Cibola National Forest "area of influence" (AoI – the 10 counties in which the mountain ranger districts reside), there is a need for the revised plan to provide direction for management and accommodation of the removal of miscellaneous products for commercial, noncommercial, and tribal and land grant use, such as wood products, firewood, grass seed, plants (used for food, fuel, medicine, or crafts) or other materials.

### **Range and Grazing**

The revised plan needs to provide management direction to the livestock grazing program that incorporates adaptive management toward ecosystem-based desired conditions, with particular emphasis on management in times of drought or other extreme weather related events. There is a need for the revised plan to incorporate into plan direction adaptive management strategies from past NEPA decisions in order to adjust management decisions to meet desired conditions and/or project standards and

objectives, as the need is determined through monitoring.

- Building adaptive management flexibility into management allows for decisions that are responsive to needed adjustments in permitted actions. Historically, decisions have been too narrowly focused, such as deciding to authorize a specific number, kind, or class of livestock with specific on- and off-dates under a specific type of grazing system. These kinds of decisions have restricted management flexibility in meeting desired conditions and project objectives.

Previous project-level NEPA-based decisions remain valid as long as the authorized activity complies with laws, regulations, the current forest plan, and is within the scope of the project-level NEPA-based decision. Therefore, it is not necessary to initiate new site-specific analyses in order to undertake a modification that has already been analyzed, decided upon, and documented. Management actions should be adjusted when monitoring indicates that those actions are not effective in reaching defined objectives.

The revised plan needs to change range management emphasis from providing “forage to promote sustained livestock yield” to “using livestock to achieve and sustain desired conditions and improve resistance and resilience in the face of short-term drought and anticipated climate change.”

The revised plan needs to address closer coordination with NMDGF on elk use of Cibola forest and rangelands in order to minimize degradation of those lands by elk, livestock, or both.

## **Recreation**

There is a need for plan direction to be less prescriptive and reduce the restrictive language, but rather provide broad guidance to the recreation program.

Because of extensive development of adjacent non-NFS lands and a drastic increase and changes in types (e.g., trail use vs. picnicking) of visitor use of many areas, *1985 Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* classifications are impractical. There is a need to update *the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* classifications and adjust the total acres in each class in the revised forest plan.

There is a need to for revised plan direction to revamp group size limitations within designated wilderness areas.

There is a need for plan direction to allow adaptive assessment of site capacity (persons at one time [PAOT]) of developed and dispersed recreation sites and allow managers the flexibility to change site capacity based on demand and management ability.

There is a need for plan direction to allow more flexibility in reporting of acreage adjustments to *Recreation Opportunity Spectrum* and *Wilderness Opportunity Spectrum* classifications affected by road closures and the revisions to ranger district motor vehicle use maps.

There is a need for plan direction that addresses the use of volunteers for dispersed and developed recreation maintenance and construction consistent with volunteer regulations. Revised plan direction should avoid prescribing whether use of a particular developed site requires a fee, as this is entirely dependent on fee authorities that periodically sunset.

There is a need to be responsive to changing trends in regard to services, activities and types of facilities desired by the public, but balance those with fiscal reality. The trends in demographics such as the expectation for an older and more ethnically diverse population, the need to promote outdoor physical activities, especially among youth, and the desire to support local cultures and economies should all be considered in establishing a path forward for recreation management on the Cibola National Forest mountain ranger districts. The revised plan should consider:

- Trends such as increasing day use versus overnight use, and increasing interest in wildlife viewing, should be taken into account.
- Public safety, including geologic and hydrologic concerns, potential user conflicts, conservation of natural resources, and maximum effective use of available funds should all be recognized as important considerations.
- Improvements to barrier free accessibility should be continued.

## **Trails**

There is a need for the plan to better address the sustainability, relevance, and feasibility of existing and planned trail systems. Plan direction could address:

- New approaches to trail management including trail construction and maintenance, given the reality of limited maintenance funds; focusing priority on trails and trail systems that are financially, environmentally, and socially sustainable.
- Sustainable trail design and maintenance standards providing for trail experiences that the public desires, e.g., loop opportunities, connectivity, and destination trails.
- Ways to address the supply and demand for differing types and skill levels of trail users (motorized, mountain biking, hiking, and equestrian use). In some areas it may be appropriate for shared use trails, while in other areas a separation of uses (use-specific) may be more appropriate. In some locations, restricting equestrian and mountain bike use to designated routes (similar to motorized travel) or areas may need to be considered.
- Working with local communities that wish to promote certain trail systems and special events – such as for mountain biking –to support the community while not compromising other recreation users or other multiple-use objectives.
- The revised plan should include approaches utilizing use of partnerships, volunteers and/or user councils to assist with maintenance issues and to recommend solutions to user conflicts.
- Assessment and management of unauthorized trails.

## **Scenery**

There is a need for the revised plan to institute a flexible and updated scenery management system, based on objectives for specific areas, that allows for activities to support ecological health and creation and enhancement of diverse wildlife habitats, while retaining and

enhancing pleasant and interesting scenery that supports tourism.

### **Designated Areas**

There is a need to consider recommendations for special designations such as wilderness, research natural areas, and special management areas with unique recreational, scenic, historic, cultural, zoological, botanical, paleontological, or geological features.

There is a need to update plan direction for managing existing wilderness. Particular issues to consider include overuse, special use permitting, the use of prescribed fire, and control of non-native species.

There is a need to include plan direction for Inventoried Roadless Areas, including opportunities for restoration.

### **Special Uses**

Elements of the special use permitting process are the subject of law, regulation, and policy that are not amenable to a Forest Plan decision. At same time, there is a need for the revised plan to update plan direction regarding special uses. Direction should be reexamined to determine if it conveys support for appropriate special uses of the national forest that provide public benefits, including economic and other community benefits. In addition, the direction should ensure forest resource impacts are minimized, and the discretion of Forest Service decision makers is maintained. Among the areas where specific guidance may be needed are:

- Permitting for large and/or recurring events, including seasonal limitations;
- Permitting associated with trails receiving heavy use;
- Screening criteria for consideration of special use permits;
- Carrying capacity of areas versus the number of outfitters desiring permits;
- Clarifying resource protections associated with special use permitting such as road maintenance requirements for private easements.
- Updating spatial locations of existing utility corridor rights of way on the Cibola in existing Cibola GIS, and updating maintenance and repair agreements of special use utility easement permits.

### **Roads**

There is a need for the revised plan to incorporate new approaches for managing roads, given the reality of limited maintenance funds combined with the public's desire for motorized access to the forest. These approaches may include considering partnerships for road maintenance, establishing priorities for maintenance to minimize or mitigate resource damage, and promoting public safety.

There is a need for plan direction to synchronize road maintenance priorities and application of best management practices with watersheds identified in the *2011 Cibola Watershed Condition*

*Framework* analyses as being in impaired or at-risk condition.

There is a need to update the plan to include direction for closing out unneeded roads, including temporary roads and roads in environmentally or geologically hazardous locations.

### **Infrastructure**

The revised plan needs to provide direction on how forest management of infrastructure investments should be prioritized given varying funding levels of money and a portfolio of deteriorating infrastructure and increasing initiatives of sustainability.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide management direction regarding sustainability of deteriorating infrastructure that has archeological significance.

There is a need for the revised plan to be responsive to changing trends with regard to services, activities, and types of facilities required for mission delivery, balanced with fiscal reality (workforce capacity for operation and increasing maintenance costs).

### **Lands and Boundaries of the National Forest**

The revised plan needs to provide direction for the process of obtaining legal road access to the mountain ranger districts, access that meets public, private landowner, and management needs.

There is a need to ensure the revised plan direction accurately reflects the essence of the 2008 Land Adjustment Strategy, aiming for contiguity of the land base and reduction of small unmanageable tracts. There is a need for tracts acquired in the past 29 years to be assigned to a management area, and to provide plan direction for how to assign future land acquisitions.

Complete up-to-date marking of national forest boundaries appears unattainable; a situation that can result in problems such as timber trespasses or encroachments. There is a need to provide plan direction for boundary line maintenance that recognizes some areas are at greater risk for trespass and encroachment than others.

### **Geology, Minerals, and Energy**

There is a need for the revised plan to update and/or clarify plan direction regarding recreational metal detecting, mineral collection, and gold panning.

There is a need for the revised plan to utilize and maintain the Forest Service Minerals databases for Locatable, Leasable and Salable minerals and to coordinate with industry and other State and Federal Agencies that manage mineral resource data.

There is a need to update plan direction to address potential commercial oil, gas, and hardrock mineral exploration and uses so that those operations will be planned, conducted and reclaimed as to minimize adverse environmental impacts.. There is also a need for the revised plan to provide direction on the noncommercial use of common mineral materials so that other

resources can be adequately protected.

There is a need for the revised plan to contain plan direction for providing Cibola Forest minerals and geology program information to the public, including interpretive geology and information on locatable, leasable, and salable minerals, landscape rock sales, prospecting, and fossil hunting.

There is a need for the revised plan to provide plan direction in anticipation of potential proposals for transmission corridors and alternative energy generation, including wind, biomass, and geothermal, while protecting natural resources, heritage and sacred sites, and scenery.

### **Conservation Education**

There is a need for the plan to promote opportunities with volunteers and partners that will provide conservation education (including demonstration areas) regarding forest management; sustainable use level of non- timber forest products; recreation, and other multiple uses.

### **Monitoring**

There is a need for the revised plan to include an updated and realistic monitoring plan that is not inconsistent with staffing and funding resources to accomplish same.

### **Research**

There is a need for the revised plan to provide direction on opportunities to conduct research on the mountain ranger districts, regardless of whether proposed research would occur on a research natural area.