



U.S. Forest Service Frequently Asked Questions

Final Planning Directives for Implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule

January 30, 2015

What is the action being taken by USDA and the Forest Service?

Issuance of the final Land Management Planning Directives.

The Forest Service Directive System consists of Forest Service Manuals (FSMs) and Forest Service Handbooks (FSHs).

Why are the USDA and the Forest Service taking this action?

The current land management planning directives were written to implement a previous planning rule and are inconsistent with the new rule. The Agency is revising the directives to provide additional guidance for implementing the 2012 Planning Rule.

The 2012 Planning Rule is the most significant update of Forest Service planning regulations in 30 years. The Planning Rule and Directives are designed to provide the framework and tools for completing land management plan revisions or amendments faster and with reduced costs. The framework and tools rely on current science, an open, transparent public engagement process, and an all-lands approach to enable better outcomes for people and the environment. Land management plans set forth specific desired conditions and guidance for forest health and resilience, species and habitat protection, contributions to sustainable communities, and recreational opportunities and other multiple uses.

What makes the Planning Directives important?

Forest and Grassland Supervisors (Supervisors are the Agency lead for a forest or grassland) will use the final Planning Directives to develop land management plans. The National Forest System (NFS) consists of 193 million acres of national forests and grasslands. The land management plan for each forest and grassland provides a framework for integrated resource management and guides decisionmaking on projects and activities on the unit. The 2012 Planning Rule provides the overarching framework for individual forests and grasslands to use in developing, amending, and revising land management plans.

Where can I find copies of the Final Planning Directives?

The Directives are available online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule/directives>.

What is the intent of Forest Service Directives such as the Planning Directives?

The Forest Service Manuals and Forest Service Handbooks contain the Agency's policies, practices, and procedures that serve as the primary basis for internal management of programs and administrative direction. The FSMs contains legal authorities, management objectives,

policies, responsibilities, instructions, and guidance for staff to plan and execute programs and activities. The FSHs are the principal source of specialized guidance and instruction for carrying out the policies, objectives, and responsibilities contained in the FSMs.

All Agency directives (FSMs and FSHs) are published on the World Wide Web/Internet at <http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives>.

What exactly is included in the Planning Directives?

Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1920–Land Management Planning

FSM 1920 sets forth legal authorities, management objectives, policies, responsibilities, and delegations for carrying out the 2012 Planning Rule. In addition, FSM 1920 sets forth policy for continuing to carry out the 1982 rule procedures at FSM 1926 for those units that are revising or amending their land management plans prior to approval of the 2012 Planning Rule as allowed for under 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3).

Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.12–Land Management Planning Handbook

FSH 1909.12 lays out specialized guidance and instruction for implementing the 2012 Planning Rule. The individual chapters of FSH 1909.12 are –

- Chapter - Zero Code
- Chapter 10 - The Assessment
- Chapter 20 - Land Management Plan
- Chapter 30 - Monitoring
- Chapter 40 – Public Participation
- Chapter 50 - Objection Process
- Chapter 60 - Forest Vegetation Resource Planning
- Chapter 70 - Wilderness Inventory and Evaluation
- Chapter 80 - Wild and Scenic River Evaluation

How were the final Planning Directives developed?

The final Planning Directives reflect public input received through a process similar to the open, participatory public engagement effort used during development of the 2012 Planning Rule. They reflect input from more than 16,000 public comments, Agency and interagency advice, experience from forests implementing the rule, national and regional resource staffs, and the Federal Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule (FACA Committee) for the implementation of the new rule.

The FACA Committee, representing diverse viewpoints, was formed in June, 2012 to advise the Chief of the Forest Service and the Secretary of Agriculture on implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule. The FACA Committee reviewed the proposed Directives through a series of public meetings and offered detailed recommendations in November, 2013. The final Planning Directives closely reflect the recommendations of the FACA Committee. Information about the Committee may be found at online at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule/directives>.

How were public comments on the proposed Planning Directives considered?

The Forest Service requested comments on proposed directives from February 27 to May 24, 2013. During this timeframe, the Forest Service received 17,449 responses (excluding duplicates), including mailed letters, faxes, emails, and web submissions from www.Regulations.gov. Of those, 370 were unique letters, and the remaining 17,079 responses were form letters.

The Forest Service analyzed the responses using a process called content analysis developed by the Forest Service's National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Services Group. Using content analysis, the NEPA Services Group identified individual comments by topic in each response, they evaluated similar comments from different responses, and they summarized like comments as specific concern statements.

The Forest Service considered all of these comments, along with the recommendations from the FACA Committee, to make changes in development of the final Planning Directives. The FACA Committee's recommendations as well as the public comments received and the Agency responses to the public comments and to the FACA Committee recommendations can be found at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule>.

How are the final Planning Directives different from the proposed Planning Directives?

Public comments and recommendations from the FACA Committee highlighted the need to clarify the proposed Planning Directives in a number of areas. Planning can be complex; the final Planning Directives clarify procedures required during the planning process, such as identifying species of conservation concern. The final Planning Directives also enhance the focus on adaptive management and public engagement in developing land management plans.

In particular, the final Planning Directives require that the Responsible Official develop a public engagement strategy before starting a land management plan revision process. The goal is to help people know what to expect throughout the process. Another example of enhanced public engagement in the final Planning Directives is the addition of a requirement that the assessment report be available for public review for at least 30 days prior to it being finalized. The proposed Directives addressed public engagement during the assessment but did not address public review of the assessment report.

The final Planning Directives also emphasize monitoring to evaluate how effectively a land management plan is implemented and whether the plan was properly designed to accomplish its goals. As needed, land management plans can be amended to more accurately reflect changing needs and any new information that may have emerged during the monitoring process.

Which forests will be the first to use the Planning Directives, and how do the final Planning Directives apply to the forests that are developing plans or amendments under the 2012 planning rule (the early adopter forests) and the Tongass National Forest)?

Over the past 3 years, 19 National Forest System (NFS) units were selected to be "Early Adopters" and were the first to start revising their land management plans using the 2012 Planning Rule, prior to completion of Planning Directives. These forests will now integrate into their ongoing planning processes the approaches and techniques included in the final Planning

Directives, according to the transition processes contained in the Forest Service Manual. The Supervisor is responsible for ensuring a smooth transition. FSM 1920.3 paragraph 9 of the final Planning Directives sets forth specific policy for situations where the planning process began after the 2012 Planning Rule became effective but before issuance of the final Planning Directives. The Supervisor should use the final directives in any new step of the planning process but is not required to revise past steps or phases within the process. The intent is to avoid significant disruptions to ongoing public engagement and planning schedules.

National Forest	State
Chugach	AK
Inyo	CA
Sequoia	CA
Sierra	CA
Flathead	MT
Nez Perce	ID
Clearwater	ID
Nantahala/Pisgah	NC
Cibola	NM
El Yunque	PR
Francis Marion	SC
Tonto	AZ
Rio Grande	CO
Helena	MT
Lewis and Clark	MT
Carson	NM
Santa Fe	NM
Gila	NM
Lincoln	NM

What is the current state of National Forest System land management plans?

There are 127 land management plans in the National Forest System. There are 19 plan revisions underway that are using the 2012 planning rule procedures and 11 plan revisions, initiated prior to 2012, that are using the 1982 procedures, as permitted by the new planning rule. These numbers continue to change as the Agency finishes and starts new land management plan revisions annually.

What will happen to land management plans that are already under way using the 1982 rule procedures?

The 2012 Planning Rule and the final Planning Directives include a transition provision that allows national forests and grasslands that began their plan revision using the 1982 procedures either to continue and complete revision using 1982 Planning Rule procedures or to use the new rule. (See FSM 1920.12, FSM 1922, and 36 CFR 219.17(b)(3)). The Forest Supervisor is

responsible for determining the best approach, notifying the public if any changes are made to the process and minimizing any disruptions to ongoing planning efforts.

How will the Planning Directives impact jobs and small businesses? How will they affect rural America?

The Planning Directives ensure that as land management plans are revised, the Agency carefully considers how the forest and/or grassland affects the surrounding region and how a revised plan can contribute to the social and economic sustainability of the region. The Directives include direction to provide opportunities and access for a range of uses, including sustainable recreation, which would contribute to the social and economic health of communities.

National forest management activities contribute to job creation in many ways including contracting with local businesses for services and products, and the value of ecosystem services, such as commodity and recreation-based economies. The public's use and enjoyment of National Forest System lands greatly contribute to local economies through the revenue generated by more than 173 million recreational visits made annually to national forests and grasslands.

How will the Planning Directives help create useful land management plans?

The Planning Directives incorporate many of the best practices the Forest Service is already using across the National Forest System. They support restoration, and provide a platform for public participation and collaboration that has proven effective in allowing stakeholders to move beyond conflicts of the past and find agreement on accomplishing work on the ground.

The Planning Directives were purposefully designed to help ensure an adaptive land management planning process that is inclusive, efficient, collaborative and science-based to promote healthy, resilient, diverse and productive national forests and grasslands.

What framework for planning is set out in the Directives?

The Planning Directives provide a framework for adaptive management that was established in the 2012 Planning Rule. The Agency's 30 years of experience with land management planning under the 1982 Planning Rule suggested the need for the adaptive management approach which helps managers respond more quickly and effectively to changing conditions and needs.

The framework consists of a three-part cycle during which the Forest Service will:

- (1) **assess** conditions, stressors, and opportunities on national forests and grasslands within the context of the broader landscape by rapidly identifying and evaluating relevant existing information from a variety of sources;
- (2) **develop, revise or amend** land management plans; and
- (3) **monitor** conditions to detect changes on the unit and across the broader landscape, to test assumptions underlying management decisions, and to measure the effectiveness of management activity in achieving desired outcomes.

The phases of the framework are complementary and are intended to create a feedback loop that allows the Forest Service to adapt management to changing conditions and to improve plans based on new information and monitoring. Through this framework, the Planning Directives support a collaborative and science-based planning process so that plan revisions and

amendments are informed by public values and the best available scientific information. The framework is intended to ensure that managers understand the context for management of the units within the broader landscape. It is also designed to facilitate adaptation in response to impacts from climate change and other stressors to resources on the unit, allowing responsible officials to respond to new information and changing conditions.

The Planning Directives include direction about plan components. What is a plan component?

Plan components are the elements (standards, guidelines, desired conditions, objectives) that guide decisionmaking about future projects and activity. Plan components can apply to the entire plan area or to specific geographic or management areas, depending on what is specified in the plan. Standards, guidelines, desired conditions, objectives, and suitability of lands for uses are all required plan components. All projects and activities must be consistent with plan components.

The Planning Directives also identify other types of content for plans – goals, priority watersheds, a description of distinctive roles and contributions and a monitoring program—that are not used to evaluate projects and activities but that provide the overall management framework for the forest.

How will the Planning Directives help national forests and grasslands restore lands and promote resilient ecosystems?

The Planning Directives provide guidance to units in implementing the 2012 Planning Rule to promote healthy, resilient, diverse, and productive national forests and grasslands. National Forest System (NFS) lands provide among the highest quality habitat and the cleanest water of all lands in the country. Land management plans provide for the maintenance of those lands. There are also millions of acres of NFS lands that are degraded or are at risk of becoming degraded, and need restoration. From large scale pine beetle outbreaks in the Intermountain West, to hazardous fuels near communities, there are many restoration needs. The Directives provide a framework for land management plans to include requirements for restoration of those lands and ecosystems.

For example, Chapter 10, “Assessment” and Chapter 20, “Land Management Plans” require planning teams to consider relevant issues such as: climate change; insects and disease; recreation, timber, and shifts in local demands and national market trends; population growth and demographic shifts; water supply protection; and ecosystem services. Plans that address these types of issues and risks, with approaches grounded in a larger landscape perspective and information from a broad spectrum of sources and users, will provide a planning framework that can facilitate adaptation and help the Agency meet its goals for restoration and ecosystem resilience.

How will the Directives help national forests and grasslands promote watershed health and clean water?

The Planning Directives include direction about how to carry out the 2012 Planning Rule requirements to protect soil and water and maintain and restore terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, watersheds, water resources and riparian areas in the plan area. The key focus on watersheds and water resources in the planning process under the 2012 Planning Rule reflects the

importance of this natural resource, and the Department and Agency's commitment to stewardship of our Nation's waters.

The Planning Directives include the rule requirement that plans identify watersheds that are a priority for restoration and maintenance. Land management plans are required to include plan components to maintain or restore water quality and water resources, including public water supplies, groundwater, lakes, streams, wetlands, and other bodies of water.

What is considered a species of conservation concern? Who within the Forest Service is responsible for identifying species of conservation concern (SCC)?

A species of conservation concern is a species for which there is substantial concern about the species' capability to persist over the long term in the plan area, but that is neither a federally listed threatened or endangered species nor a candidate species for listing. The Regional Forester is responsible for identifying species of conservation concern, and the final directives define process for selecting SCC's and considering plan components for their management. The intent is to provide the ecological conditions (habitat) necessary to maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern within the plan area.

The Agency's ability to maintain species diversity is limited by factors outside of the Agency's authority or control, such as climate change, extreme disturbance events, and urbanization on lands outside of or adjacent to NFS lands. If the Agency cannot maintain a viable population of a species of conservation concern within the plan area because of such factors, the 2012 Planning Rule requires that the Agency provide plan components to maintain or restore ecological conditions within the plan area to contribute to maintaining a viable population of that species across its range.

Do the Planning Directives include an appeal process or a pre-decisional objection process? Will the public be able to appeal a final forest plan decision?

The Planning Directives do not include an appeal process. Instead, individuals and entities that submitted substantive formal comments during the development of a plan, revision, or amendment will be able to use the objection process to work with a reviewing officer before a decision to approve a plan, revision, or amendment. The directives encourage people to participate early in the planning process, when their input can have the greatest impact and value.

How do the Planning Directives support increased transparency in decision-making?

The Planning Directives require the responsible official to reach out to the public and other governmental entities throughout the planning process. In addition, the Forest Service must publish notice of planning activities at numerous stages in the process; the public will have opportunities to be involved when the responsible official prepares assessment reports, elements of the plan and monitoring evaluation reports. For transparency, the responsible official must document the use of the best available scientific information during the planning process.

How will the Planning Directives increase public engagement and collaboration?

The Planning Directives require the responsible official to reach out to a diverse group of stakeholders and provide opportunities for public participation throughout all stages of the planning process. Specifically, the responsible official is required to encourage participation by

interested individuals and entities, private landowners, youth, low-income populations, minority populations, Tribes, other Federal agencies, States, counties, and local governments. In designing opportunities for public participation, responsible officials are required to consider the accessibility of the process as well as the discrete roles, jurisdictions, responsibilities and skills of interested and affected parties.

The planning team must develop a public participation strategy at the beginning of the planning process so the public will know what to expect at each stage. The 2012 Planning Rule and Directives provide greater opportunity for people to engage early in and throughout the process, and to interact directly with the Responsible Official, than under previous rule procedures.

How do the Planning Directives encourage coordination and cooperation beyond National Forest System boundaries?

Many management issues, including fire, water and wildlife, require an understanding of what is happening both on and off National Forest System lands. The Agency is committed to working across boundaries with our neighbors to enhance land management activities, to save time and money, and to improve engagement. During the assessment phase, the responsible official must identify and evaluate existing information about the patterns of land ownership, planning/zoning status and use in and around the plan area. This includes consideration of conditions and trends along the plan area boundary such as transportation, wildland urban interface, and open space connectivity. These same considerations will inform the development of plan components.

The Planning Directives emphasize working across boundaries so that plans reflect an understanding of management choices in the context of the larger landscape. The Forest Service will be engaging other agencies, State and local governments, Tribes, and the public earlier in the process than previously required. Stakeholders will have the opportunity to participate in the assessment process and development of the proposed plan, plan amendment, or plan revision instead of waiting until the proposed plan is released for comment. In each phase of the planning process, Responsible Officials must review and consider the plans of Indian Tribes, Alaska Native Corporations, other Federal agencies, and State and local governments. Forests and grasslands would leverage their resources and knowledge with those of Tribes and other agencies to make planning, monitoring and implementation more efficient.

How is the Agency addressing the concerns of federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations?

The Planning Directives recognize treaty rights and that the Federal government has certain trust responsibilities and a unique legal relationship with federally recognized Indian Tribes. The Planning Directives require the responsible official to honor the government-to-government relationship between federally recognized Indian Tribes and the Federal government.

The Responsible Official is required to offer consultation with federally recognized Tribes and Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) consistent with the requirements of Executive Order 13175, which establishes consultation requirements for the Federal government, and 25 U.S.C. 450 note, which requires that Federal agencies consult with ANCs on the same basis as Indian Tribes under the Executive Order. In addition, the responsible official is required to encourage participation by Tribes and ANCs in the overall public engagement effort throughout the

planning process and to request information about native knowledge, land ethics, cultural issues and sacred and culturally significant sites to inform the planning process. Federally recognized Tribes would also be encouraged to seek cooperating agency status where appropriate, which would provide them with further opportunities to be engaged throughout the land management planning process.

How do the final Planning Directives apply to the Inventoried Roadless Areas covered by the national Roadless Area Rule or the state rules for Colorado or Idaho?

The roadless areas established by these rules are considered to be administratively designated areas. These areas must be identified in the land management plan. Responsible Officials shall ensure that plan components applicable to such areas are compatible with the restrictions of the applicable roadless rule. The Responsible Official, in the planning process, does not have the authority to modify the boundaries of roadless areas covered by such rules.

What is the relationship between the proposed directives and the travel management rule?

The final directives require that resource plans, such as the travel management plans, developed by the Forest Service be consistent with land management plans. Where travel management plans are already in place, they would be evaluated for consistency with land management plans.

How will areas be evaluated for wilderness and what changes are proposed as compared to the previous process?

The planning rule requires that plan revisions and new plan development identify and evaluate lands that may be suitable for designation as wilderness. The final directives (FSH 1909.12 chapter 70) streamline the current process by focusing on four major steps: the inventory of areas, the evaluation of the areas, analysis of areas to be considered in the plan alternatives, and recommendations for designation. The inventory is intended to be reasonably broad in the identification of areas that may be suitable for wilderness; further evaluation and analysis of these areas, along with public involvement, would identify areas within the inventory for recommendation. Inclusion in the inventory does not by itself require any particular management. The evaluation examines areas for characteristics related to the Wilderness Act including naturalness, size, opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation, special features and also manageability of the area. Some of those areas may be brought forward for further analysis in the alternatives considered in the plan. The plan decision will include any final recommendations for designation. Public participation is expected to occur throughout this process including opportunities for the public to review the areas in the inventory.