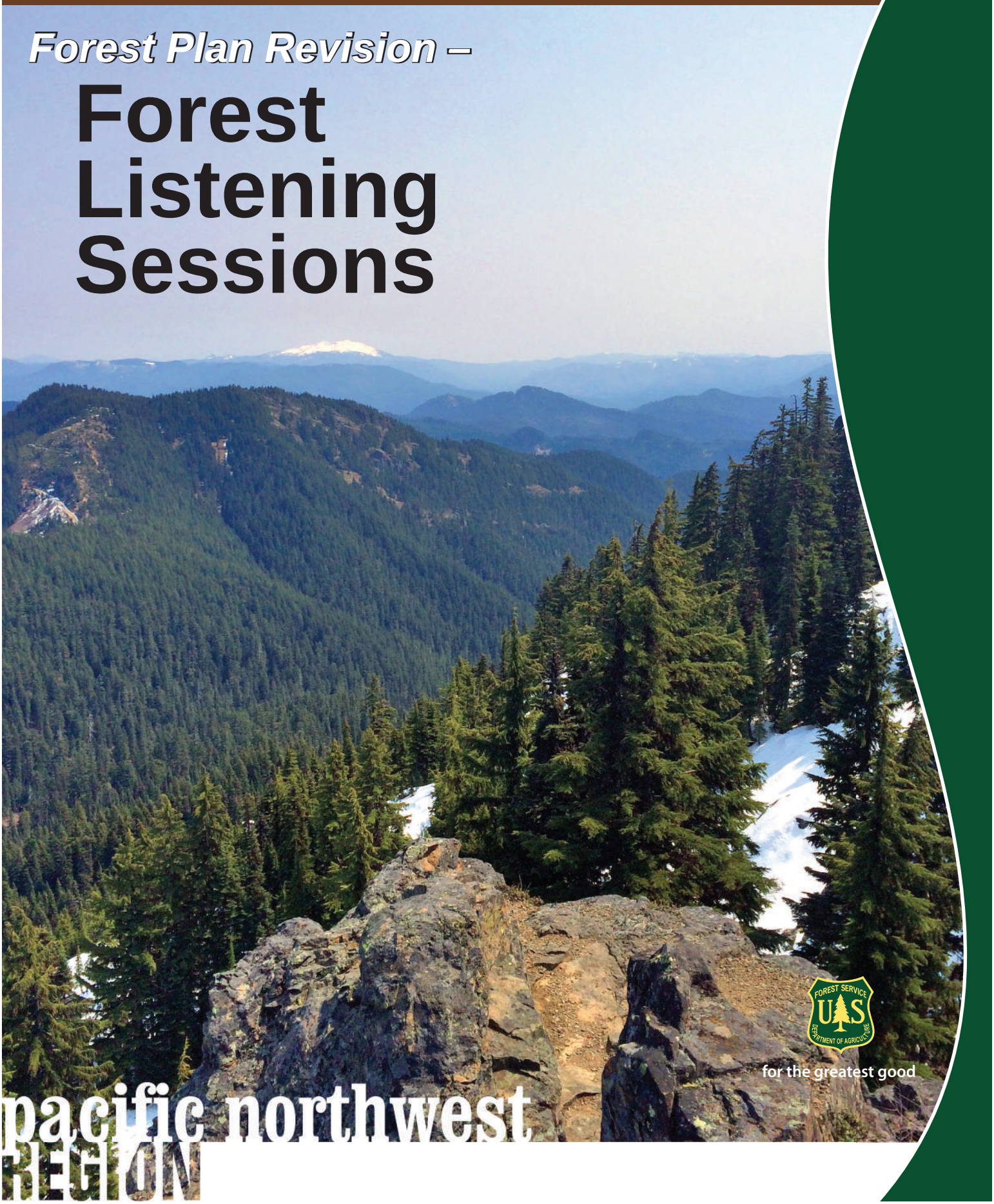
United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Plan Revision –

Forest Listening Sessions



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Executive Summary

The Forest Service held 19 listening sessions across the Northwest March – June to gather feedback from the public about forest plan revision. Plan revision has not yet begun on forests within the Northwest Forest Plan geographic area, with the exception of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. The listening sessions were designed to gather public feedback early in the process to enable to the Forest Service to incorporate feedback in its initial plan revision strategy. The listening sessions gathered feedback on the use of science, public engagement during plan revision, and people's specific interests in plan revision.

The first three listening sessions were held in March and coordinated by Triangle consulting. The feedback from those listening sessions has been summarized in a companion report available at: http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/r6/landmanagement/?cid=stelprd3831710.

This compendium of reports summarizes the additional 16 listening sessions that were held between April 23rd and June 11th, 2015. At each listening session, participants were invited to give feedback at roundtables focused on three separate topic areas. The topic areas included: 1) what participants would like public engagement to look like during forest plan revision, 2) the use of science in plan revision, and 3) what participants would like the Forest Service to consider during plan revision. We developed an executive summary of feedback from the listening sessions as well as summary reports for each of the three topic areas that synthesize feedback from all 16 listening sessions. Wherever possible, we worked to retain the flavor and tone of public comments.

General Plan Revision

A range of issues and concerns were raised related to the plan revision process. Participants would like plan revision to balance local social values and economic considerations with environmental concerns and forest health. Comments also suggested managing for forest health and resilience (especially resilience to wildfire), and thinning and fuel reduction were suggested to support resilience and healthy forests. Many participants expressed the view that fire management and fire risk need to be more fully considered in forest plan revision. Public comments also commonly expressed an interest in more salvage logging. Some community members expressed concerns about Forest Service staff retention and employee and leadership turnover. Some comments requested

additional employee presence in the woods and others recommended use of local volunteer groups and higher education systems to increase capacity for implementing projects and getting work done. Some people would like to see protection for all mature and old growth forests, age limits on harvest, or elimination of commercial logging. Others want to see compliance with NW Forest Plan timber outputs, more timber harvest of old trees, more pre-commercial thinning, or an increase in timber harvest to equal growth. Likewise, some participants wanted to NW Forest Plan protections retained or enhanced while others would like fewer restrictions. Comments related to multiple use recommended balance between uses and expressed concern about conflicts between different uses (e.g. motorized and non-motorized recreation). One of the most popular plan revision topics was recreation. Participants would like more focus on recreation and would like the Forest Service to address high use areas and conflicting uses. Road access as well as the cost and ecological impacts of road were raised. Road maintenance and safety is key to local users who value many different uses on the national forest. Some requested consistency in plan revision across forests and others stressed the importance of a local approach. Most public comments on water resources supported a continuing program to protect, improve, and support water quality and watershed health. The comment heard most often related to wildlife was to move away from single species management. Community members also talked about their desire to see biodiversity maintained or increased, including habitat and forest-floor plant species.

Public Engagement

Two of the most common messages heard at the public engagement roundtables at the listening sessions were that people would like a transparent and clear plan revision process and that people want their feedback to matter. Transparency was requested on the Forest Service's intent, the plan revision timeline and process, and when the next opportunities to engage will be. Clear and concise communication about what is going on was requested. Many participants shared the feeling that they don't feel listened to or that their feedback was ignored. Some noted a perception that input isn't used because an agenda is already in place and the decisions are pre-determined. In general, participants wanted to see more emphasis on the value of public input. Others noted concerns about Forest Service capacity and the lengthy plan revision timeline. Participants offered a variety of ideas for sharing information, reaching more people, and engaging with the public, including more face-to-face meetings, field tours, and surveys. Ideas about who should be engaged and the kinds of information people would like to discuss or access were also shared.

Science

Listening session participants expressed strong interest in how science will be used and shared with the public during the plan revision process. Participants would like to see more external involvement of both the public and non-federal scientists in the process. Comments suggested a broad range of science for consideration in plan revision. A strong desire for the use of unbiased science came up at the listening sessions, and questions about how the Forest Service will deal with conflicting science were common. Many comments focused on the need to put science in lay terms and help increase collective understanding of the scientific process and terminology. In addition, participants shared a host of helpful ideas about how to best share science, including field tours, public meetings, suggestions for the website, and more. The science theme with the most extensive public feedback related to how the Forest Service applies science to management. Many comments also suggested science should be informed by

practical, hands-on experience. Across the region, discussions about science inevitably resulted in discussions about values. There was a sense from many participants that science is outweighed by politics and that the Forest Service should commit to using science to guide forest management instead of being driven by other things such as recreation demand or political opposition to salvage logging. Concern about politics overriding science was shared by those with both extractive- and conservation-leaning comments. Finally, many comments focused on the irreducible uncertainties faced by managers and suggested flexibility in management plans paired with adaptive management.

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