



United States Department of Agriculture

Forest Plan Revision –

Forest Listening Sessions



for the greatest good

**pacific northwest
REGION**

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CHAPTER 2 – PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT ROUNDTABLES

INTRODUCTION

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 the plan revision process or 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. Table 1 displays listening session dates and locations summarized in this report. 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

TABLE 1. FOREST PLAN REVISION LISTENING SESSIONS DATES AND LOCATIONS

| Listening Session Date | Location(s) |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| April 23rd | Mt. Vernon |
| April 27th | Corvallis and Prineville |
| April 28th | Issaquah, Olympia, Bend, and Roseburg |
| May 4th | Pleasant Hill, Lakeview, and Medford |
| May 5th | Klamath Falls and Wenatchee |
| May 6th | Stayton and Gold Beach |
| May 11th | Hood River |
| June 11th | Okanogan |

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.

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

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.

TRANSPARENT AND CLEAR PROCESS

Many comments expressed a strong interest in transparency during the plan revision process

which participants believe will help build trust. Transparency was requested on the Forest Service's intent, the plan revision timeline and process, and when the next opportunities to engage will be. People would like clear and concise communication about where the Forest Service is at in the process. Participants also commonly requested advance notice of meetings (e.g. 2-4 weeks) and sharing of relevant information (e.g. agenda, background materials, draft documents) prior to meetings so people can arrive prepared and ready to contribute. Likewise, comments recommended identifying the main points the Forest Service wants people to engage on and clearly identifying what is needed or wanted from the public. Community members would like the Forest Service to be honest and up front about what can and can't be changed, to acknowledge public expectations that can't be met, and to be clear about sideboards and where they come from.

Participants want the Forest Service to make sure the public involvement or engagement process is worth people's time. A recommendation was made to start with a basic orientation to the topic (what is a forest plan, why should people care) in plain language to help provide context and clarity for plan revision. Comments requested a lot of outreach, involving the public early before decisions are made, and keeping people involved throughout the process. Updates were requested at each major step in the process as well as during lulls in activity. In general, people would like more information shared. Updates as decisions are made (including how comments were incorporated or not) were appreciated. On the other hand, one comment noted that too much public engagement can bog down the process.

Participants requested focused communications and clarification of the importance of listening sessions, planning meetings, or other requests for public engagement. Comments requested clear and understandable documents and presentations as well as the use of simple, non-scientific, plain

English. Participants recommended the Forest Service use information it already knows about what the public wants and thinks is important. Others recommended the Forest Service know the concerns of all stakeholders and think through how people in communities use forest lands. Participants would like to see continuity maintained as people and stakeholders change. Participants would like engagements to be opportunities for two-way communication and specifically requested no public comment requests between Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. Participants would like to know who the district and Forest Service contact people are for plan revision.

PUBLIC FEEDBACK

One of the most commonly heard comments on public engagement across listening sessions was some variation of people not feeling listened to or that their feedback doesn't matter or was ignored. Some noted a perception that input isn't used because an agenda is already in place and the decisions are pre-determined. Participants want to see more emphasis on the value of public input and suggested engaging the public could result in other options or solutions that may not otherwise have been considered. Many comments recommended the Forest Service find a way to show the public is being heard and that public input is appreciated.



Comments suggested the Forest Service clearly explain the process, how public input will be used, decisions, and why decisions are being made. Similarly, another recommendation was to either act on public input or provide feedback to the public about why suggestions are not being followed, i.e. transparency in how the feedback was used or not. Finally, some commenters suggested the public may feel feedback isn't worth their time since 'nothing happens', i.e. there is not a lot of output. Others would like to see public feedback become part of the official record.

Many participants suggested local input be weighted more heavily or given more consideration than other types of input such as from people in large urban cities or national interests. These types of comments were sometimes associated with the sentiment that local community concerns are not valued, that outside interests have more financial resources to weigh in, or that local people know the forests and resources while others may not. Similarly, some participants suggested that most of the information should come from Oregon and Washington because DC doesn't understand our forests and local resources. Suggestions to assign more weight to comments based on economic impacts, from people who volunteer to assist with forest work, from more frequent forest users, and from local collaboratives were shared. Some people voiced a concern that too much attention is paid to the loudest voice and specifically referenced environmental concerns in this regard. Others noted that both rural and urban interests should have a voice in the process and that public lands deserve input from all over the country. Similarly, participants recommended consideration of input from all types of interests and recommended broadening the input base and showing no favoritism. In addition, comments suggested minority opinions be respected and heard. Some participants were interested in how to engage people on the east coast or in other parts of the country on western lands issues.

Participants recognized the presence of conflicting points of view on forest management issues and had a range of suggestions for addressing it. For potentially controversial or "negative impacting" issues, comments recommended plenty of communication as well as bringing urban and rural folks together to increase mutual understanding. Similarly, others suggested getting groups or individuals with diverse or conflicting interests together in order to find common interests or goals and agree on definitions. Likewise, participants suggested the Forest Service engage interests in a profound conflict resolution or collaborative process in advance of NEPA work. Some recommended a third party mediator to address the polarization. People would generally like to spend less time arguing and more time accomplishing things.

Forest Service Capacity

Many participants noted the importance of strong, trusting relationships between local Forest Service staff and community members and interest groups. Recommendations include allowing staff to get out on the land, prioritizing relationship building, and being active participants in the community. Comments noted a loss of local knowledge among Forest Service workers and a desire for Forest Service employees to know what's happening on the forest. Others requested employees be up-to-date on revision efforts even if it isn't their department. In addition, comments expressed frustration with employee change (turnover) because conversations and input are lost. The lack of continuity makes it seem like citizen input is unimportant. Participants would like to see continuity of Forest Service representation and would like to deal with one person to increase clarity and trust. Comments suggested the Forest Service has lost skills to engage with the general public.

The special role of district rangers was noted, and suggestions for rangers include: operating collaboratively, having quarterly meetings with various interests, and attending public meetings to become more knowledgeable. One comment noted

the importance of having public affairs staff on ranger districts because traveling to headquarters is not convenient. Finally, participants recommended streamlining Forest Service financial and personnel efficiency and taking advantage of the huge number of potential volunteers available to the Forest Service.

PLAN REVISION TIMELINE

Participants were concerned about the plan revision timeline. Comments suggested the public will value a planning process that actually leads to a decision and would like certainty that the process will efficiently lead to a decision. Participants suggested staying on timeline, not letting projects slip, and staying on the path of progress rather than getting derailed by special interest groups. Conversely, one participant recommended the Forest Service not be in a hurry. Community members suggested the overall duration of planning projects causes people to disengage and spans Forest Service personnel changes, breaking the connection with the public. A recommendation was made to create a strategic stakeholders group to develop a shorter plan revision timeline as 4 years is seen as too long. Participants expressed concern about a lengthy and costly process. Finally, in areas where forest plan revision is already underway, participants expressed frustration with what seems like an endless process with little progress. Such comments suggested it's time to make decisions and move forward.

SHARING INFORMATION AND REACHING MORE PEOPLE

Participants recommended using multiple types of outreach activities to reach different audiences and different communities. Comments suggested a more user-friendly and up-to-date website as well as making forest plan revision information prominent on the regional and national websites. Likewise, comments suggested providing a link on the homepage to plan revision information. Inclusion of science information on the website was also recommended. Participants generally requested the Forest Service use more creative ways of getting the word out. Comments recommended using the website, local newspapers, local TV stations (at key times, not in morning), local talk shows, radio, PBS, and OPB to spread the news about meetings or other activities. Participants also regularly mentioned flyers as good way to reach people, including posting flyers at: post offices in small communities, ranger district offices, supervisor offices, the library, the courthouse, grocery stores, and outdoor equipment stores. Very simple flyers were recommended. Notices and information could also be posted at trailheads. In addition, participants would like sign-up sheets available at Forest Service offices, campgrounds, visitor facilities and at national park visitor centers. An email list was recommended to keep folks involved and up-to-date on the process, decisions, and scientific findings though limited online access in some areas was noted and newsletter updates/ hard copies were also suggested, especially to national forest neighbors. Comments suggested more clarity about how to sign up for the email list. One comment suggested email sublists by interest areas (e.g, trail maintenance, citizen science, etc.). Participants recommended maintaining an updated contact list

of mailing addresses and email addresses, inclusive of email addresses for clubs and non-traditional contacts that use local forests.

Participants would like the Forest Service to use plain language in their outreach materials including in newspapers, on the internet, and in group emails. Comments suggested putting public engagement topics in the forefront of the messaging and using targeted marketing to help people understand why the NW Forest Plan and plan revision is important to them. Comments also suggested making the process more interesting and paying attention to the design of materials for public consumption. One recommendation was to consider the success of the Smokey Bear campaign and perhaps create a new forest mascot.

Community members recommended sharing information with local clubs, community groups, user groups, and Facebook groups and having these groups share the information with their members. In addition, enlisting the support of local elected officials to help spread the word was suggested.

LOCATION AND TIMING

Some community members suggested local meetings for local issues and regional meetings for regional issues while others suggested engagement at the forest level or below. Similarly, some participants recommended meetings be held in areas affected by the forest or in smaller venues closer to communities (e.g. district level in community buildings, libraries, granges, and different community venues). Local meetings in areas convenient for people to get to were commonly requested. Neutral meeting settings to reduce bias were also recommended. Meetings at various times and meetings after 5:00 p.m. were requested, as were weekend meetings (especially earlier in the day).

PARTICIPANTS SHARED MANY IDEAS FOR ENGAGING MORE PEOPLE IN PLAN REVISION, INCLUDING:

- Have frontliners provide visitors with plan revision information;
- Use social media, including photos of current work and professional presentations (though others suggest not relying too much on social media for various reasons);
- Create a twitter feed on the home page (e.g. Mt. Hood);
- Reach groups who haven't been engaged through new media including cool graphics, video, and new interpretation methods;
- Have field-going folks inform visitors in forest;
- Place more effective stories in the media and keep reporters informed and in the loop (though one comment expressed concern with an agency bias in the media);
- Reach out to online environmental magazines;
- Have an interesting and fun forest planning booth at county fairs or other events (e.g. Sportsmen Show, Hood River first Friday);
- Use open forums like public schools to reach younger generations;
- Connect with local universities;
- Post on town social websites and bulletin boards;
- Offer coffee;
- Use any kind of communications; and
- Spread free pizza rumors

WAYS TO ENGAGE

Participants expressed general support and appreciation for the listening sessions, especially the local listening sessions, and would like to see more face-to-face meetings like them. However, participants would like accessibility needs, in particular for deaf people, considered. Some participants suggested gathering input from individual groups (e.g. hunters, recreationalists, timber) at separate meetings to minimize conflicts. Others suggested meetings or workshops by topic area (e.g. sustainable timber supply, riparian, recreation, salmon) open to all interest groups. Some comments suggested the traditional process gets diluted because there are too many topics. In general, participants like small meetings that allow people to engage and have group discussions as this is a good way for citizens to be heard in a respectful, non-threatening forum that provides real opportunities for dialogue. Community members would like to see an educational component included in public meetings. Smaller, less formal gatherings at local establishments were recommended as were quarterly meetings between all recreation groups. One suggestion was to collaborate with partners to host events as a way to leverage the Forest Service budget. A multi-agency meeting was suggested as was a regional citizen advisory committee. Finally, commenters noted that many folks are working hard to make ends meet in struggling counties and may lack the time or knowledge to attend listening sessions or public meetings.

A popular suggestion was to use surveys to ask the public for feedback. Surveys could provide a diversity of opinions on what issues are of concern to citizens and what the public would like to see prioritized. Mail and paper surveys were recommended as were electronic surveys. Participants also requested interactive maps, including for alternative comparison. In general, comments showed interest in maps, graphics, charts, and plenty of other visuals.

IN ADDITION TO MORE PUBLIC MEETINGS LIKE THE LISTENING SESSIONS, PARTICIPANTS SUGGESTED:

- More field trips, including field trips on weekends or evenings when more people are available – allowing people to see and experience areas will encourage them to care more about the process and help them better engage throughout plan revision.
- Field trips for different groups or clubs.
- Field trips for particular actions or issues open to a cross-section of the public – the forest is a better place to have many discussions, including on issues like adaptive management, riparian management, and risks to resources.
- Forest Service presence at local interest group events to learn about groups' issues and share updates.
- Town halls (they bring out the most people).
- Information sharing at meetings with partners on other projects.
- "Train the trainer" approach – multiplier effect by using members of diverse communities (who are embedded in the community) to pose questions to the larger community.
- Featured speaker events.
- Events to engage people, especially kids (e.g. fishing events or something fun to do in the woods).
- Focus groups with local youth.
- Interpretive information at recreation sites was also encouraged to engage new people.



Recommendations included using webinars (maybe filmed in the woods?), videos on forest plan revision, and other technology to share information and get people more involved. Some participants requested an online dialogue forum though others noted a concern with such forums providing narrow viewpoints. A webcam and blog featuring lookouts, guzzlers, pelican colonies, eagles nests, etc. was suggested.

Participants noted that low attendance is partly due to boring presentations. Presenting and engaging the public on plan revision in more interesting ways was suggested. Traditional engagement methods such as providing opportunities for open-ended comments (written and electronic) and holding public hearings or open houses were also requested. Some participants shared a belief that better comments come when they are taken onsite rather than during written comment periods.

Participants also requested a collaborative process amongst all user groups and sometimes referred to collaborative processes as true engagement because input is actually incorporated. The importance of having a common goal was noted. Community members would like the Forest Service to engage existing collaboratives and would like collaboratives to do more outreach to the public, i.e. hold public meetings or otherwise disseminate

information back to their constituents. Some areas that don't currently have existing collaborative groups would like them to be created. Others suggested the creation of forest-wide collaborative groups and stressed the importance of including all interest groups.

Specific requests were made of line officers. Comments requested that district rangers: 1) produce quarterly newsletters on plan revision, 2) open ranger district offices once a month on a Saturday to meet with interested people and build relationships, and 3) reinvigorate local contacts at ranger districts to make it easier to access data. In addition, participants requested that line officers engage all stakeholders and keep engaged with all groups (no favorites).

TOPICS FOR INFORMATION SHARING OR DISCUSSION

Participants requested more information on a range of issues, including digestible background information on plan revision such as why plan revision is needed, the plan revision process and timeline, who makes decisions on best available science, where collaboratives fit, how people can engage and why their input is important, and what the bigger picture sideboards or "planning criteria" are. People would also like clear and simple summaries of existing forest plans, the NW Forest Plan, and how they overlap. Others would like clarification on where to access existing forest plans. Many comments suggested using videos to explain both the planning process and science information. As discussed at the science tables, people would like to know what worked from the current forest plans and the NW Forest Plan and what is "stale" or needs to be addressed. In addition, people would like the Forest Service to share the results of all the listening

sessions with the public and people who attended. In general, participants saw a need to dispel the public perception that the plan is already done and the Forest Service is just “appeasing” the public.

Education and raising awareness around a suite of issues was suggested. Participants talked about the need to raise awareness of what the national forest system has to offer and what actually happens on Forest Service lands. Another suggested topic was how forest management has changed and the potential for diverse forest management for diverse values and outcomes. Participants would also like to see more education on Forest Service history and multiple use. Comments recommended education on Forest Service rules and lingo (e.g. PacFish, InFish, NFMA) as well as current protections for wildlife, streams and fish. Others suggested the Forest Service share its forest management goals, mission and congressional mandates with the public. Many requests were made for more information about science as well as acknowledgement of conflicting science or unknowns. Public engagement related to science topics is discussed in the Science Roundtables Sharing Science section.

Other topics recommended for education or discussion include:

- Forest Service management impacts (positive and negative) on small communities, including discussion of limited economic support that recreation offers;
- How communities and groups use forest lands and why;
- What the public values and wants from their forests (possible to map?) and the associated tradeoffs;
- Working forests and what forests do for people (cool water, recreation, etc.);
- Forest fires, fire suppression focus, and comparison of areas with and without fire;
- Special places;

- Recreation and recreation statistics and use estimates;
- Issues pressuring the forest (large and small scale);
- The manufacturing infrastructure required to manage forests; and
- What has changed since original forest plans were published.

Participants suggested starting small, for instance by explaining what a national forest is and what wilderness areas are. Comments showed interest in information that would detail what’s at risk and what can be gained through forest plan revision. People would like plans for public involvement included in forest plans (which could invite enthusiasm from users who like to do trail maintenance, invasives removal, etc.). Comments expressed an interest in hearing about successes throughout the process. Similarly, others requested shared information about inspirational projects and annual accomplishments. Finally, participants suggested a simplified public comment process easier for people to understand, perhaps one more like the scoping process.



APPENDIX: WHO TO ENGAGE AND MISCELLANEOUS

Participants recommended outreach and engagement of diverse interests and suggested better identification of stakeholders (broader) and better outreach. Participants recommended reaching out to:

- Tribes
- Listening session participants
- Private landowner neighbors
- Local stakeholders and community legitimizers
- Rural communities
- Neighborhood associations, granges
- Local and urban people
- Recreation groups
- User groups and clubs (esp. those already existing with mailing lists) including hunting, fishing, snowmobile, mountain biking, environmental, horseback riding, hiking, and ATV groups
- Watershed and stewardship groups
- Soil and water conservation districts
- Forest collaboratives
- Minority groups, including latinos, refugees, immigrants, and international students
- Kids and younger people, including low-income kids
- Junior Rangers, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4-H, Campfire
- High schools, local universities, community colleges and OIT
- Professors and college students
- Places like climbing studios to reach younger generation
- Permit holders
- Commissions or planning commissions
- County commissioners
- Other agencies (e.g. USFWS, BLM, National Park Service)
- States and state natural resource agencies
- Elected officials
- Local cities and town councils, especially along forest boundaries
- Community planning directors and parks and recreation staff
- Businesses (partner with them – posters, notices, etc.)
- Community Action Teams
- Agriculture and livestock interests, ranchers
- Timber interests
- Rafting businesses
- Beekeeper organizations
- Travel organizations
- Non-economic interest groups
- Conservation voices, including land conservation groups
- Individuals (“old timers” representing recreationists, environmentalists, engineers, loggers, FS retirees) with a life of experience

Some comments received during the listening sessions could not be easily sorted into the themes summarized above.

- Encourage FS to have public meetings in Upper McKenzie Valley and Okanogan County. Have more meetings in Seattle not Seatac. Meetings need to be held within ½ hour of Sequim, Port Angeles, and Port Townsend. Not much engagement with staff because it is “Lakeview”; perception is Klamath is left out.
- Allow FS control because of the more direct connection to the community.
- Need to follow through with promises.
- FS needs ID who – get out & meet w/groups individually.
- Do not reinvent the wheel! Use the lessons learned from our planning process in the 1980’s.

- Learn from Region 5 revision – long process with fewer and fewer participants.
- Concerned with regional process. Communication between Forest Service and county is not inclusive. Interaction between county commissioners and Forest Service, the public interest is being left out.
- Transparency in where GIS data comes from: who is collecting, how is it collected, what are the inputs.
- I want to know that what it takes to finance a Forest Plan revision is given serious consideration/discussion at all levels.
- Sustainable roads process was good.
- OFRI model of information successful at engaging public – state-run.
- Backcountry Horseman West Cascades wants chapter participants involved in discussions. They are a service group and do trail maintenance; train their own sawyers; want to train folks in general so there is a better understanding about stewardship, etc.
- Offer more incentive for participation, for example beer.
- Identify “hubs” (consistent use of communication).
- When taking public comment, write exactly what words they are using.
- Construct scenarios through media and technology now vs. then.
- Public meetings need to be managed to avoid having some take over meeting, (ex. NRA vs. Safety Advocates).
- Long comment periods.
- Re-invest in public meetings and field trips prior to preferred alternative publication.
- Alarming announcements on roads – private land users have different rules at times under permits, etc.
- Roads closed – a lot already closed – scare tactics.
- Public comment is important, but can’t replace professional expertise.
- Utilize social science to understand the public attitudes towards the revision process (and capture the public’s level of understanding).
- Need to know demographics of forest users – age, cultural background.
- Need to know demographics of non- forest users.
- When EIS or environmental analysis need public involvement, input needs to be recorded and part of public record.
- User groups use this venue to further their agenda, not give meaningful feedback.
- Lawsuits could drag out process.
- Change how litigation is funded.
- Private industry is ahead of FS because lawsuits slow down the FS.
- Instill consequences for suing FS by making appellants pay for court costs.
- Difficult to engage because not present in field ... rural stations have closed.
- We’ll come to your meetings and give our opinions and we’ll see you in the woods (blocking your crappy sales) when you come to cut them down. FOR THE WILD!
- Communicate shared responsibility to not just use, but give back, too.
- Logging interests are LAST only 3% of Oregon economy in timber now.
- FS doesn’t seem to promote their products – maps – we need vendors.
- Agency needs to encourage ownership of public lands – better travel maps; fix online links.
- Front office needs to encourage recreation.
- Get FS faster computers to make it more user friendly.
- Afraid to go out in the woods because LEO’s are ticket writing happy. People need to feel safe/secure. Focus should be on teaching – not punishment.
- Buy some black pens, less RED INK.
- What can the public do on the forest, not can’t do?

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- Is the Forest Service directive to generate dollars for Treasure/County or who?
- How does the public get involved in FS financial decisions?
- Lot of meetings about collaborating, but not much progress.
- Possible funding for local communities to propose NEPA processes.
- Grassroots base for collaboratives more effective than agency driven.



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