

Record Of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement and Revised Land and Resource Management Plan

Routt National Forest
February 1998

*Located within
Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties, Colorado.*

My Decision

I have selected Alternative C as described in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Routt National Forest. By selecting Alternative C, I am also approving the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan) which describes in detail the goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, management area direction, lands suitable for timber harvest, monitoring, and recommendations for wilderness and other special areas for Alternative C.

I selected Alternative C because the strategic guidance it establishes best matches the direction I believe needs to be taken on the Routt National Forest. The revision topics represent the significant issues examined in this forest plan revision. Revision topics are:

1. Biological Diversity
2. Roadless Areas and Wilderness
3. Timber Suitability and Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ)
4. Recreation and Travel Management
5. Wild and Scenic Rivers

Each alternative evaluated in the FEIS addresses these revision topics in a different way. From these revision topics, I developed four priorities to aid in making my decision. These priorities are:

Ensuring the Long-term Health of the Land. This encompasses all of the revision topics. Without healthy ecosystems, we cannot sustain the values currently offered by this Forest.

Implementing a Balanced Program Featuring a Sustainable Output of Multiple Uses. The revision topics represent some of the diverse uses that people expect from this National Forest. These uses include wilderness, wildlife habitat, water, timber products, and a variety of recreational opportunities. Some of these uses are relatively compatible with each other while others are not. I choose to focus on the concept of balance among the various uses. By

sustainable, I mean the achievement and maintenance in perpetuity of the output of renewable resources without impairment of the productivity of the land.

Continuing the Emphasis on High-quality Dispersed Recreation Opportunities. Concerns over the type of recreation opportunities we emphasize resulted in the Recreation and Travel Management revision topic. The Routt National Forest is well known for the opportunities it offers in dispersed recreation. I want to make sure that the Routt maintains its reputation for high-quality dispersed recreation.

Being a Good Neighbor to the People and Communities Who Rely On and Value the Forest. People value the Routt National Forest for many different reasons. Some depend upon the Forest for their livelihood; others value the recreational opportunities and scenery it offers. Being a good neighbor means being mindful of these values in making this decision and during implementation of this plan.

Implementing Alternative C will best address the revision topics and the four priorities I developed from them. I did not pick an alternative that maximized or minimized any particular element because I think it is important to strike a balance between these priorities. However, the most important part of my decision was ensuring the long-term health of the land for the enjoyment of future generations.

Many comments were received during the comment period. Alternative C, as modified, reflects these comments and is a logical outgrowth of our analysis and public involvement efforts. I know that selecting Alternative C is not likely to completely satisfy every group or individual. However, I feel that Alternative C sets a reasonable course that gives most people some satisfaction while providing future opportunities to participate in plan implementation.

As provided in 36 CFR 219.10(g), this decision will remain in effect until the Plan is revised in 10 to 15 years.

This Revised Plan and FEIS are programmatic and represent a management strategy for the Routt National Forest. The Revised Plan does not include site-specific decisions. Rather, it provides overall systematic guidance and establishes management direction to govern future actions. The flexibility and adaptability of this Plan to changing conditions is an important factor in my decision. We will amend this plan as circumstances warrant.

Key Features of the Routt National Forest

The Routt National Forest is located in northwest Colorado and includes over 1.2 million acres of high plateaus, rolling foothills and mountains exceeding 13,000 feet. The Continental Divide crosses the Forest for approximately 113 miles.

The Forest provides habitat for over 300 wildlife and fish species. Included are relatively common species, such as deer, elk, and rainbow trout and less common species, such as marten, goshawk, and Colorado River cutthroat trout.

The Routt National Forest is rather unique in that it can be characterized as remote and undeveloped while also providing a high level of multiple use values for people.

The Forest includes the headwaters of the North Platte River, the Yampa River, and part of the Colorado River. These rivers provide high-quality water for a wide variety of uses.

The Forest provides forage for large numbers of deer and elk, along with approximately 12,000 cattle and 71,000 sheep each year. Trees from the Forest are processed into a wide variety of products to meet the demands of people across the nation.

The Forest offers a wide variety of recreation opportunities, with an emphasis on dispersed recreation. There are over 260,000 acres of wilderness (approximately 19% of the Forest) and over 500,000 acres inventoried as roadless (approximately 36% of the Forest). Most of the 800 miles of trail, including the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail, are available to hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers. More than half of the 1900 miles of roads are open to motorized use. There are many developed campgrounds and trailheads. The Steamboat Ski Area provides a world-class skiing experience to over 1.1 million people each year.

The Routt National Forest is important nationally, regionally, and locally because of these features. The decisions I am making in this plan perpetuate the special features of the area and recognize the people who enjoy or make a living from this land. Because all of the key features mentioned above are dependent upon the health and productivity of the land, my decisions also ensure that ecosystems are maintained in or restored to a healthy, vital condition.

This Record of Decision (ROD) documents the decisions I am making for 234,069 acres on the Arapaho National Forest. The Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest currently administers 104,744 of these acres. Expected outputs from these lands are disclosed separately in the FEIS.

Public Involvement

The Routt National Forest conducted an extensive public involvement process throughout the development of the Revised Plan. Initially, issues and concerns were identified by the planning staff after reviewing existing environmental documents, reading letters from the public, and talking with other Forest personnel. These issues were presented to the public and discussed during a series of open houses in May of 1992. These meetings helped refine the issues, identify potential solutions to issues, and develop a preliminary range of themes for the alternatives.

The issues addressed in the revision process are identified by the revision topics listed on page 1. Revision topics are generally thought of as subjects which require change based on resource conditions, technical knowledge, or public perception of resource management. The revision topics constitute the identification of significant issues, as required by law. The revision topics are fully described in Chapter 1 of the FEIS.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in the Federal Register in July of 1993. The public was kept informed throughout the forest plan revision process through a series of newsletters and news releases.

The revision topics and preliminary alternatives were presented at a series of public meetings in September of 1993. Discussions were lively, opinions diverse, and the level of interest in the forest plan revision high. Another series of meetings were held following publication of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in February of 1996. These meetings were held to clarify information presented in the DEIS and answer questions. Additional meetings were held with local governments and interest groups (environmental, motorized and nonmotorized recreationists, timber industry, and others) throughout the plan revision process.

Forest Planning Staff consulted with other Federal agencies (the Bureau of Land Management, Fish and Wildlife Service, National Park Service, and Natural Resources Conservation Service); various state agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources and the Colorado Division of Wildlife; Indian tribes; and county governments.

Publication of the DEIS and proposed Revised Plan in February of 1996 was followed by a 90-day public comment period which was scheduled to end on May 16, 1996. The comment period was extended until July 1, 1996. The Forest received 300 individual letters commenting on the DEIS and draft Revised Plan. The Forest Supervisor and Forest Planner read each of those letters, and the planning staff responded to them (see FEIS, Appendix K). I am well informed about the content of these comments and the changes made between the draft and final documents as a result of these comments. See Appendix A of the FEIS for more information on public involvement activities.

Alternatives Considered

Before describing the alternatives evaluated in the FEIS, I would like to make some important points concerning the alternatives.

The strength of this planning process lies in the alternatives and the way they are formulated. The alternatives express a range of concerns and issues raised by the public. The range of alternatives is not based on predetermined outputs but rather on themes responding to issues raised by the public. Any similarity in the numbers between alternatives is purely coincidental.

All alternatives include the concepts of multiple-use, sustained yield, and ecosystem management. All alternatives share a set of basic goals and standards and guidelines which ensures protection of Forest resources and compliance with applicable laws.

All alternatives (including the updated no action alternative) use a new numbering scheme for the management areas that is consistent with other Forests in the Rocky Mountain Region and surrounding Regions.

All alternatives meet the management requirements of 36 CFR 219.27, as well as all other legal and regulatory requirements. More information about the alternatives can be found in Chapter 2 of the FEIS.

All alternatives meet the goals established in the 1992 Rocky Mountain Regional Guide, as amended. These include:

- Protecting the basic soil, air, and water resources.
- Providing multiple uses and sustainability in an environmentally acceptable manner.
- Providing a variety of life through management of ecosystems.
- Providing scenic quality and a range of recreation opportunities that respond to our customers and local communities.
- Emphasizing cooperation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies to coordinate planning and project implementation.
- Promoting rural development opportunities.

- In cooperation with other landowners, striving for improved land ownership and access patterns, to the mutual benefit of both public and private landowners.
- Improving the financial efficiency of all programs and projects.

General Description of the Alternatives

Alternative A (The No Action Alternative)

Alternative A is an updated no action alternative. "No action" means that current management under the 1983 Plan would continue for the next ten to fifteen years. This alternative is updated to include new technology, management area prescriptions, and standards and guidelines.

The 1983 Plan projected an ASQ of 390 million board-feet (MMBF) per decade. However Alternative A has a revised ASQ of 230 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 250 MMBF per decade, based on an updated inventory and analysis of suitable timberlands, FORPLAN modelling, yield tables, silvicultural practices, new management area prescriptions, costs, and revenues.

This alternative does not recommend more wilderness but does provide for some backcountry areas and a wide range of recreation opportunities.

Alternative A responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires are limited. Vegetation changes are generally initiated by humans. One proposed Research Natural Area (RNA) of 600 acres is identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. No additional wilderness designations are recommended. An additional 12% is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 421,335 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 230 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 250 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - Semi-primitive recreation opportunities are emphasized. Summer nonmotorized recreation is emphasized on 44% of the Forest, with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - No additional eligible wild and scenic river candidates are identified. Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action.

Alternative B

This alternative was developed in response to the roadless revision topic and in part to the biological diversity issues of old growth and mature forests. It maintains all roadless areas in backcountry management area prescriptions, recommends several areas for wilderness, and provides a higher level of nonmotorized recreation opportunities than Alternative A. Lands identified for timber management are in a general forest allocation. Compared to Alternative A, Alternative B has a lower ASQ and has more areas identified for backcountry recreation, more proposed RNAs, and more eligible wild and scenic rivers.

Alternative B responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires have greater influence on vegetation composition and structure than they do in Alternative A. Five RNAs, totaling 70,100 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. An additional 10% of the Forest is recommended for wilderness designation. In addition to wilderness acres, another 22% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 244,397 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 94 MMBF of conifer and 10 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 104 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - Summer nonmotorized recreation is featured on 69% of the Forest, with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. More collector roads have restrictions to public motorized use or are managed at low maintenance levels to discourage use. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternative C (The Selected Alternative)

This alternative was developed in response to all of the revision topics and the concern that forest management maintain an emphasis on multiple-resource objectives. Many of the programs are similar to those in the 1983 Plan, however Alternative C allocates more areas to backcountry recreation.

There is a lower level of timber production than in Alternative A because more timber harvest lands are in the general forest allocation rather than the intensive timber management allocation. This alternative provides similar opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation as Alternative A but has more eligible wild and scenic rivers and designates more RNAs.

Alternative C responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires have more influence on vegetation composition and structure in backcountry and wilderness areas (totaling 41% of the Forest) than they do in areas featuring more intensive management. Three RNAs, totaling 31,465 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. No additional wilderness designations are recommended. An additional 22% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 357,821 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 148 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 168 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - There will be a mix of motorized and nonmotorized recreation, with continued emphasis on dispersed recreation opportunities. Summer nonmotorized recreation is featured on 54% of the Forest, which is somewhat higher than

Alternative A. The remainder of the forest is available for a mix of recreational opportunities. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternative D

This alternative addresses the revision topics by allocating areas to backcountry prescriptions, recommending a small amount of additional wilderness, and producing timber in areas historically managed for timber harvest. Compared to Alternative A, Alternative D has more backcountry areas, a lower ASQ, more proposed RNAs, and more eligible wild and scenic rivers.

Alternative D responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires have more influence on vegetation composition and structure in backcountry areas than they do in areas featuring more intensive management. Five proposed RNAs, totaling 70,100 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. An additional 2% of the Forest is recommended for wilderness designation. In addition to wilderness acres, another 27% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 296,009 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 171 MMBF of conifer and 10 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 181 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - Summer nonmotorized recreation is featured on 54% of the Forest with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. The motorized opportunities occur mostly in areas associated with intensive management. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternative E

This alternative was developed in response to the motorized recreation and timber revision topics and to meet requirements for a maximum resource production alternative. Compared to Alternative A, this alternative has fewer backcountry acres, a similar level of timber production, more proposed RNAs, and more wild and scenic rivers.

Alternative E responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires are limited. Vegetation changes are generally initiated by human-caused activities, such as timber harvest and grazing. Five proposed RNAs, totaling 70,100 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. No additional wilderness designations are recommended. In this alternative, 7% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 421,008 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 260 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 280 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - Summer nonmotorized recreation is featured on 39% of the Forest with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. Similar to Alternative D, most motorized opportunities are associated with other management activities. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternative F

The basis for this alternative came from a group of local residents working with the Colorado Environmental Coalition. The alternative is framed around the concept of island biogeography. The group feels this is the best way to perpetuate biological diversity. There is less emphasis on programs such as recreation and timber management. Recreation would be allowed. However, if a resource conflict affecting biological diversity occurs, the conflict would be resolved in favor of biological diversity. Timber production occurs on a small scale in areas allocated to general forest prescription.

This alternative emphasizes preserving large tracts of land in a series of core reserve allocations and recommended wildernesses. Compared to Alternative A, this alternative has more recommended wilderness, proposed RNAs, and eligible wild and scenic rivers and less timber production, oil and gas production, and grazing.

Alternative F responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires have more influence on vegetation composition and structure. Six proposed RNAs, totaling 71,600 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. An additional 25% of the Forest is recommended for wilderness designation. In addition to wilderness areas, 20% of the Forest is managed as core areas with an emphasis on biological diversity.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 154,493 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 49 MMBF of conifer.

Recreation Travel Management - Summer nonmotorized recreation opportunities are featured on 82% of the Forest with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. Some additional arterial and collector roads will have restrictions to public motorized use. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternative G

The basis for this alternative came from members of the Jackson County Multiple Use Coalition. This alternative was developed to address the concern that multiple-use emphasis be the focus of forest management and provide for motorized recreation, timber production, and other uses of the Forest.

This alternative emphasizes a multiple-use concept to maintain or improve the economy and quality of life for local residents. This alternative is similar to Alternative A in timber production but has fewer acres in backcountry allocations and more land in the general forest allocation.

Alternative G responds to the revision topics as follows:

Biological Diversity - Insect and disease outbreaks and wildfires are limited. Vegetation changes are generally initiated by human-caused activities, such as timber harvest and grazing. Five proposed RNAs, totaling 70,100 acres, are identified for monitoring and research.

Roadless Areas/Wilderness - Approximately 19% of the Forest is managed as designated wilderness. No additional wilderness designations are recommended. In addition to wilderness acres, 4% of the Forest is managed for dispersed backcountry recreation and maintenance of roadless character.

Timber Suitability/ASQ - There are 418,732 acres suited for timber production. The ASQ for the first decade is 226 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total ASQ of 246 MMBF.

Recreation/Travel Management - Summer nonmotorized recreational opportunities are featured on 22% of the Forest with the remainder of the forest available for a mix of recreational opportunities. The Steamboat Ski Area is the major focus of winter recreation use.

Wild and Scenic Rivers - Portions of the Elk and Encampment Rivers, totalling 48.5 miles, continue to be recommended for wild and scenic river designation and are given interim protection pending Congressional action. In addition, all eligible wild and scenic river candidates, totalling 15.0 miles, are given interim protection until a suitability study is made. This includes portions of the following rivers: North Platte, Rock Creek, Red Canyon, and Roaring Fork.

Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study

Several alternatives were considered and eliminated from further detailed study during the planning process. Alternatives which are only slightly different from other alternatives were eliminated from further detailed consideration. Alternatives eliminated from detailed study are the 1983 Plan As The No Action Alternative described below and three additional alternatives identified on page 12 of this ROD.

1983 Plan as the No Action Alternative:

Significant changes have occurred since the 1983 Plan was signed, primarily in the timber management area. The following presents a summary of the changes and provides rationale for dismissing the 1983 Plan as a viable alternative and eliminating it from further study.

Timber Suitability - There are five initial standards which are used to determine whether a particular parcel is tentatively suitable for timber production. Those lands which remain suitable after applying the five standards are termed Tentatively Suitable Timber Lands. The five standards are:

- Is the land forested? [36 CFR 219.14 (A)(1)]
- Is the land withdrawn from timber production? [36 CFR 219.14 (A)(4)]
- Is the land producing commercially usable timber? (FSH 2409.13-21.3)
- Is irreversible resource damage likely to occur? [36 CFR 219.14 (A)(2)]
- Is there reasonable assurance of adequate restocking within five years after final harvest? [36 CFR 219.14 (A)(3)]

When these five criteria were applied, tentatively suitable timber lands decreased by 9,300 acres compared to the 1983 Plan.

The next step in determining timber suitability was to identify lands where timber production was not appropriate. Areas with other resource uses precluding timber production were identified. This included riparian areas and unique habitat. In addition, areas with physical barriers to timber harvest (extremely rocky or wet soils) were excluded from the suitable base. The resulting lands are tentatively suitable and common to all alternatives. When compared to the 1983 Plan, tentatively suitable lands common to all alternatives decreased by a total of 98,800 acres.

Changes to Modelling Allowable Sale Quantity - To estimate ASQ, a FORPLAN model was built using the latest modeling available, FORPLAN Version 2. The model used for the 1983 Plan was FORPLAN Version 1. There are many differences between the two versions. In addition, the following components of the model were updated:

Suitable Timberlands - As explained above, the tentatively suitable timber lands were analyzed and updated.

Yield Tables - The yield tables were updated to incorporate current technology and resource data.

Costs and Revenues - All timber management costs were updated to reflect the current information and to implement standards and guides. In addition, the 1983 model did not consider the cost of entering roadless areas or areas without rights-of-way or access. The updated model takes these specific costs into account. Revenues have been updated to reflect the last three-year average returns from timber sales.

Modelling Standards and Guidelines - Standards and guidelines have been updated for the new management area prescriptions. The 1983 model did not constrain the amount of acres harvested to meet visual quality objectives or watershed constraints. These resource constraints limit the timber harvest when implementing the forest plan and have been included in the new model.

A combination of all these factors shows that harvest potential would be reduced to approximately 230 MMBF of conifer per decade, which is lower than the 1983 Plan ASQ of 390 MMBF of conifer per decade. The incorporation of changes clearly shows that 390 MMBF per decade is not achievable and would render the 1983 Plan infeasible for implementation. Alternative A was designed to reflect current management. It best represents the implementation of the 1983 Plan over the last 15 years and is the No Action Alternative.

Other Alternatives

An alternative was initially developed which would modify existing direction to ensure the stability of the local wood fiber industry, contribute towards national wood fiber demands, and offer increased motorized recreation opportunities. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because both Alternatives E and G meet these objectives.

An alternative was initially developed which was similar to Alternative C except that it would assure an above-cost timber sale program. This alternative was eliminated from detailed study because the cost of the timber sale program is evaluated in all alternatives.

An alternative was initially developed which would manage the Forest at three different levels of intensity. This alternative was eliminated because it closely resembles Alternative D.

Reasons for the Decision

This ROD explains the rationale and basis for my decision to select Alternative C for implementation and to approve the Revised Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. I am selecting Alternative C because it takes the Forest in the direction it needs to go by achieving the four priorities described previously on pages 1 and 2 and restated below:

- Ensuring the long-term health of the land.
- Implementing a balanced program featuring a sustainable output of multiple uses.
- Continuing the emphasis on high-quality dispersed recreation opportunities.
- Being a good neighbor to the people and communities who rely on and value the Forest.

I arrived at these priorities by examining the issues, concerns, and opportunities identified during the initial planning process and reviewing public comments on the DEIS and proposed Revised Plan.

This forest plan revision evolved around a concept which recognizes that National Forests are ecosystems and their management to produce goods and services requires awareness and consideration of the interrelationships among humans, plants, animals, soil, water, air, and other environmental factors within the ecosystems.

Alternative C, as described in the FEIS, is a refinement of the Alternative C described in the DEIS. The differences in Alternative C between draft and final are not substantial, and they resulted in relatively minor changes to the environmental consequences disclosed in the DEIS. This revised alternative is well within the range of alternatives the public would expect the Forest Service to consider. Most of the modifications stem from the input we received on the DEIS during the comment period.

Components of the Decision

There are six fundamental decisions made in the Revised Forest Plan:

1. Establishment of forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives, 36 CFR 219.11(b).
2. Establishment of forest-wide management requirements (Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines), 36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27.
3. Establishment of management area direction (Management Area Prescriptions and associated Standards and Guidelines for 19 management areas), 36 CFR 219.11(c).
4. Designation of suitable timberland and establishment of allowable sale quantity (ASQ). Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing. Identification of lands suitable and available for oil and gas leasing. Provision for a broad spectrum of forest and outdoor recreation opportunities. 36 CFR 219.14, 219.15, 219.16, 219.20, and 219.21.
5. Establishment of requirements for monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the Revised Plan to meet the requirements of 36 CFR 219.11(d).
6. Documentation that we will/will not recommend any further additions to the wilderness preservation system.

Alternative C was selected based on the manner in which it addresses the six decisions listed above. The following sections discuss the components of the decision in more detail.

Decision 1. Establishment of Forest-wide Multiple-use Goals and Objectives

I selected Alternative C in part because of the manner in which it will achieve the forest goals and objectives. Alternative C strikes a realistic balance between protecting and maintaining ecosystem integrity through natural processes and offering uses, goods, and services through active management. This is something the Routt National Forest has long been known for. One of my priorities in making this decision is to continue this balance. Forest goals and objectives are listed in Chapter 1 of the Revised Plan in accordance with the planning regulations at 36 CFR 219.11(b). All Forest goals and objectives are tiered to the Regional goals identified in The Rocky Mountain Regional Guide, as amended May 1992; technical correction June 1996.

The goals and objectives apply to all of the alternatives; however, each alternative achieves them in different ways and to different degrees, depending on its emphasis. Therefore, the components of biological diversity emphasized, the levels of goods and services produced, and the mix of recreational opportunities offered vary by alternative. I refer the reader to the comparison of alternatives in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. With regard to the goals and objectives, the alternatives compare as follows:

Alternative A is the no action alternative and is an expression of past management philosophy. This alternative focuses more on forest outputs than ecosystem health. It provides direction for achieving and maintaining biological diversity, but clearly emphasizes the goals and objectives relating to economic values.

Alternatives B and F lean heavily toward the function of natural processes with little or no human intervention. The components of biological diversity associated with natural processes are emphasized over goals and objectives oriented toward economic values.

Alternatives E and G emphasize resource production, within the limits of ecosystem sustainability. These two alternatives are more focused on achieving goals and objectives based on economic values. The components of biological diversity associated with more managed landscapes are emphasized.

In Alternative D, natural processes are provided for, as are the economic benefits associated with a more managed landscape. This alternative emphasizes maintenance of roadless areas, with more intensive management in areas that have been actively managed in the past.

The mix of management area allocations and standards and guidelines in Alternative C meets the stated goals of providing for multiple use outputs, maintaining the habitats and processes necessary to perpetuate biological diversity, providing a wide variety of recreation opportunities with an emphasis on dispersed recreation, and contributing to economic vitality.

Like many of you, I am concerned about forest health. I agree with Chief Dombeck's statement, "We cannot meet the needs of the people if we do not first secure the health of the land." We will define forest health in terms of management objectives. What might be viewed as healthy in a roadless area would probably not be appropriate in an urban/wildland interface area. Our intensive public involvement efforts during forest plan revision gave the public an opportunity to help define management objectives, the appropriate levels of mature forest, and the role of disturbance in maintaining forest health.

Risk of catastrophic wildfire will increase as thousands of acres of immature forests become mature. A continuing coordinated effort between federal, state, and private interests will be needed to mitigate this risk. Our monitoring and periodic amendment and revision of the Forest Plan allow us to incorporate new forest health strategies as they develop.

Our focus for the future is on outcomes rather than outputs. We will take credit for what is produced, and we will accept responsibility for the condition of the land when projects are completed. Ecosystem management is not a buzzword; it is a way of doing business, an attitude toward the land and the people we serve.

Decision 2. Establishment of Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines.

I am selecting Alternative C based on the balance between areas that are actively managed and those which emphasize natural processes with minimal human-caused impacts. This balance is achieved through Alternative C's particular combination of goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area prescriptions. The Forestwide Standards and Guidelines listed in Chapter 1 of the Revised Plan are required by 36 CFR 219.13 through 219.26 and 219.27. These standards and guidelines did not vary between alternatives.

I need to emphasize one important point. Our objective is to simplify the content of the Revised Plan. Toward that end, I have directed the Forest not to reprint all of the laws, policies, and manual and handbook direction. These rules still apply, and they supplement the Revised Plan direction. I direct you to Appendices A, B, and C for a list of them.

The rationale used for the goals and objectives applies to the establishment of standards and guidelines as well. These standards and guidelines play an important part in meeting my priority of assuring the long-term health of the land.

The standards and guidelines provide direction for management and ensure that resources are managed in a sustainable manner. They represent design criteria to ensure that projects implementing the Revised Plan move the Forest towards the desired outcomes expressed in the goals and objectives. The standards and guidelines allow those who work for the Forest and with the public to design and administer projects which accomplish Forest objectives. During plan implementation, the standards and guidelines will be monitored to ensure that they are working.

Decision 3. Establishment of Management Area Direction (Management Area Prescriptions and Associated Standards and Guidelines) for 19 Management Areas.

From a list of 24 management areas, I chose the unique mix of the 19 management area prescriptions in Alternative C to implement the Revised Plan. This direction will guide future management activities within each specific management area and is required by 36 CFR 219.11(c). Chapter 2 of the Revised Plan contains a complete description of the management area prescriptions.

The application of the management area prescriptions is where the alternatives vary the most. The mix of prescriptions and their application are key factors in my decision. The following discussion compares the alternatives and explains the rationale behind the selection of Alternative C.

Alternative A is an expression of past management. Land allocations in this alternative clearly emphasize the production of goods and services and de-emphasize other resource values. The alternative does little to address the revision topics other than timber suitability and ASQ.

Alternatives B and F are similar in that they stress the importance of minimally impacted biological systems over human commodities and traditional uses. More of the Forest would be recommended for wilderness. Less timber would be harvested, and much of it would be the result of other resource management objectives since the lands suitable and scheduled for timber management would be limited. Alternative F is based on the theory of island biogeography. To achieve that emphasis, management area prescriptions which preserve large tracts of land as recommended wilderness and reserve allocations would be employed. Recreation in both alternatives heavily favors nonmotorized uses. Users would tend to be concentrated along the major routes open to motorized use.

Alternatives E and G favor resource production. We anticipate that this could be accomplished within the biological capability of the Forest. These alternatives emphasize sustainable production on a greater area of the Forest. Both alternatives would allow the development of many roadless areas, causing a fundamental change in the unique (undeveloped) character of the land. Neither alternative would recommend additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. Both alternatives would put more emphasis on motorized recreation opportunities.

Alternative D moves toward a balance of uses with its selection and application of management area prescriptions. Suitable timber lands consist of previously harvested areas and areas outside of inventoried roadless areas. This alternative includes the recommendation of several small roadless areas for wilderness designation. Most remaining inventoried roadless areas would be managed to offer backcountry recreation opportunities.

In Alternative C, the health of the land will be emphasized while still providing for people's needs. Much of the Forest outside of wilderness would remain undeveloped. There would be no recommendations for additional wilderness designation. Timber management would occur on suitable lands at levels that assure resource protection and in an aesthetically pleasing manner.

Most of the roadless areas would be allocated to backcountry prescriptions to provide for natural ecological processes. Alternative C would provide for active management on more acres of the Forest than Alternative D, more natural processes and biological diversity associated with older forests than Alternatives A, E, or G, and a higher production of goods and services than Alternatives B or F, while maintaining biological diversity across the Forest.

Oil and gas leasing opportunities are available where suitable and in the areas of the Forest (generally outside wilderness and backcountry) where potential exists.

Relationship Between Alternative C and Management Area Prescriptions

Management area prescriptions are grouped into categories of similar management intensities. Categories range from minimal to substantial human-caused changes. In each alternative, land is allocated to prescriptions in the various categories depending on the emphasis of the alternative. Table ROD-1 lists the management area categories and gives examples of the prescriptions in each.

| Table ROD-1. Management Categories for Alternative C | | | |
|---|---|--------------|--------------------------|
| | Management Category | Acres | Percent of Forest |
| 1 | Wilderness, Backcountry Recreation with Limited Winter Motorized Use, Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers | 558,700 | 39 |
| 2 | Special Interest Areas, Research Natural Areas | 30,700 | 2 |
| 3 | Municipal Watersheds, Backcountry Recreation-Motorized | 47,600 | 3 |
| 4 | Scenery and Major Transportation Corridors, Dispersed Recreation | 81,600 | 6 |
| 5 | General Forest and Rangeland, Forest Products, Deer and Elk Winter Range | 620,600 | 44 |
| 7 | Residential/Forest Interface | 10,900 | <1 |
| 8 | Ski-Based Resorts, Existing and Potential | 8,500 | <1 |
| 8 | Utility Corridors and Electronic Sites | 59.1 miles | |
| | Nonfederal Lands within the Forest Boundary* | 64,300 | 5 |

* Forest Plan direction does not apply to these nonfederal lands.

Source: Supplemental Tables in the FEIS.

The following section (pages 16-19) briefly describes the management categories, lists key management area prescriptions in each, and discusses the application of the prescriptions under Alternative C. The following discussion does not cover each category and every prescription in it. The prescriptions described are those that differed significantly between the alternatives and/or those that carried more weight in my decision to select Alternative C.

Category 1

These are areas where ecological processes are allowed to operate relatively free from human influence. Wildlife habitat is predominately in late successional stages.

Management Area 1.11 - Wilderness - Pristine

Management Area 1.12 - Wilderness - Primitive

Management Area 1.13 - Wilderness - Semi-Primitive

By choosing Alternative C, I am not recommending any additional areas for wilderness. This decision is based, in part, on the Wilderness Needs Assessment in Appendix C of the FEIS which concluded that existing wilderness on the Forest meets the current demand for wilderness recreation and that the demand is not increasing. The existing areas also offer a broad ecological representation of the ecosystems and vegetative types on the Forest. Many people living in close proximity to the Forest stated that additional wilderness was not needed at this time.

Management Area 1.32 - Backcountry Recreation with Limited Motorized Winter Use

By using this prescription, I am ensuring a balance of appropriate uses in these undeveloped, minimally impacted areas.

Some people are concerned about the use of snowmobiles in the backcountry. My staff reviewed the literature that was submitted pertaining to snowmobile use and found that, based on current use levels and resource capacity, additional restrictions are more appropriately applied on a site-specific basis. Snowmobile use in the backcountry will be monitored and restrictions applied as the need arises.

Oil and gas leasing has a No Surface Occupancy stipulation in these areas. I chose this option to protect the roadless character of the areas.

Management Area 1.5 - Designated and Eligible Wild Rivers

The Forest has identified 5 rivers or streams as eligible for wild and scenic designation. Two rivers, the Elk and the Encampment, were previously found suitable, and I will continue to recommend them for designation. The three streams, Rock Creek, Roaring Fork/Red Canyon, and the North Platte, will be managed under a wild and scenic river prescription until such time as a suitability analysis is done. At that time, the river segment will either be recommended to Congress for designation, or it will be managed under the prescriptions of the lands adjacent to the area. Please note that eligibility will not affect the existing negotiated agreements with local water users.

By selecting Alternative C and using these five prescriptions, I am emphasizing the Routt's most visible attribute - its undeveloped areas - and maintaining future management options in these areas.

Category 2

These areas conserve relatively rare or narrowly distributed ecological settings or components. Wildlife habitat is predominately in late successional stages.

Management Area 2.2 - Research Natural Areas (RNAs)

These are areas managed to protect or enhance exemplary ecosystems designated for nonmanipulative research, education, and maintenance of biological diversity. There are three RNAs: Kettle Lakes (6,464 acres), Mad Creek (12,580 acres), and Silver Creek (12,421 acres). This is an important factor in my decision. These three areas represent a range of vegetation types and topographic features that have not been heavily influenced by humans. These three

RNAs, combined with other RNAs in the Region, ensure that research and education opportunities will be available in the future across a wide range of ecosystems.

Category 3

Natural ecological processes dominate in these areas with some evidence of human activities. Wildlife habitat is predominately in late successional stages.

Management Area 3.31 - Backcountry Recreation Motorized

Most motorized recreation opportunities exist where timber harvest and other management activities are noticeable. This backcountry prescription provides opportunities for motorized recreation in areas that are more remote and natural in appearance. Motorized use is still limited to designated routes to provide for other resource values and retain the backcountry setting.

My decision to select Alternative C is based on the inclusion of these areas and the role they play in the realization of objectives and desired conditions for the Forest.

Category 5

These are areas managed to produce a mix of forage, forest products, and wildlife habitat, while maintaining scenic resources and offering recreation opportunities.

Management Area 5.11 - General Forest and Rangelands - Forest Vegetation Emphasis

One of the key features of this prescription is that the Forest will be managed for resource production while ensuring high levels of effective wildlife habitat. The rotation age for timber harvest is extended to 200 years to simulate natural fire cycles and provide ample late successional habitat.

Management Area 5.13 - Forest Products

These are areas managed specifically to produce commercial wood products. Associated with this higher level of timber harvest activity are more roads, more motorized recreation, and more forage for livestock and wildlife.

These two prescriptions, 5.11 and 5.13, provide all of the suitable and scheduled timber lands. These areas and the timber they produce are a key component of my decision. These areas contribute heavily to goals for providing multiple use outputs and contributing to economic vitality. As the Forest vegetation grows older and the percentage of late successional forest increases, these areas will provide important landscape diversity.

Category 8

These are areas where the ecological conditions and natural processes are likely to be significantly altered by human activities, beyond the level needed to maintain landscapes with a natural appearance.

Management Area 8.22 - Ski-Based Resorts, Existing/Potential

These are areas with existing ski resorts or potential resorts which are managed for skiing and related recreation. No change in ski area allocation was made in the Revised Forest Plan. The existing ski area is in place and several years ago, following preparation of an EIS, a site-specific decision was made on a potential ski area .

In summary, nineteen management area prescriptions (including those discussed above) are selected to implement the Revised Plan. The mix of the prescriptions and the options and opportunities they offer are key factors in my decision to select Alternative C. The mix of prescriptions (refer to Table ROD-1) very effectively addresses the five revision topics. About 45 percent of the Forest is allocated to prescriptions that provide a variety of uses with minimal

levels of active management. The remainder of the Forest is managed more actively to provide multiple benefits, including commodity production. Provision is made for maintenance of biological diversity, areas are allocated to backcountry prescriptions which maintain roadless character, timber and forage production is provided for, and recreation and travel opportunities are provided, including Wild and Scenic rivers. In short, Alternative C responds to what people told us they want. I believe this alternative makes sense.

Decision 4. Designation of Suitable Timber Land and Establishment of the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ). Designation of Lands Suitable for Grazing and Browsing. Identification of Lands Suitable and Available for Oil and Gas Leasing. Provision for a Broad Spectrum of Forest and Rangeland Related Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

I chose Alternative C, in part, because of the amount of suitable lands and the level of goods and services they provide. Tables displaying the suitable land base are in the FEIS, (Chapter 3, Timber section) and meet the requirements of 36 CFR 219.14, 219.16, 219.20, and 219.21.

The level of timber to be supplied by the Routt National Forest is a controversial and highly polarized subject. The following discussion compares the timber harvest levels under the seven alternatives.

Alternatives B and F produce the lowest levels of timber harvest. Lands suitable for timber production and availability of other wood products is limited in both alternatives.

Alternatives A, E, and G produce the highest levels of harvest. These alternatives do not fully resolve the concerns expressed in the other revision topics and would develop many of the roadless areas on the Forest. A better balance is needed.

Alternative D makes a good start at achieving the balance. Suitable lands include lands previously harvested and areas outside inventoried roadless areas.

I believe Alternative C offers the balance I am seeking. Alternative C actively manages more acres of the Forest than Alternative D and provides a better mix of other resource values through the liberal use of Management Area Prescription 5.11 (General Forest and Rangelands). It assures a sustainable and moderate level of timber harvest and accomplishes that harvest in an environmentally sound and aesthetically pleasing way. Alternative C also features an ASQ which does not require unrealistic budget increases. While funding above present levels would be needed to achieve the ASQ, Alternative C does not require a doubling or tripling of the Forest budget as do some of the other alternatives. More information on the development of the ASQ can be found in Appendix B of the FEIS. Alternative C provides for forest health through a variety of vegetation management practices, such as timber harvest, prescribed burning, and livestock grazing.

My decision to select this Revised Plan (Alternative C) and the accompanying suitable timberlands takes into account the balance between the following: the needs of people, the importance of biological diversity, and the ability of the Forest to produce a sustainable level of harvest. The timber industry helps diversify the local and regional economy. On the other hand, we heard from many people who feel we have no business harvesting timber on this National Forest. On the Routt National Forest, we will continue to produce timber in a way that augments natural ecosystem processes and functions.

There are 357,821 acres of land suitable for timber management. The ASQ is 32,151 thousand cubic feet of conifer per decade (148 MMBF) and 11,987 thousand cubic feet of aspen per decade (20 MMBF). Of this amount, about 4 MMBF of conifer is expected to come from

roadless areas (see page 3-256 of the FEIS). Based on our experience with budgets, the Forest expects to sell an average of 10.1 MMBF per year of softwoods. The aspen ASQ of 20 MMBF per decade is a separate, non-interchangeable component of the overall ASQ. This harvest level is sustainable (as documented in Appendix B of the FEIS), and it is within the limits that the Forest can supply under the framework of Alternative C. This ASQ is the maximum level of timber from suited lands that we will sell over 10 years, taking into account other multiple use values and standards and guidelines.

Another extremely important facet of this Forest Plan revision is livestock grazing. Livestock grazing will continue on the Routt National Forest. We are emphasizing effective management of grazing allotments through the development of individual Allotment Management Plans. The standards and guidelines in Alternative C will improve the unsatisfactory conditions on rangelands, maintain the quality of those in satisfactory condition, and protect the Forest's fragile riparian areas and wetlands.

Alternative C has 1,140,766 acres of suitable rangelands. These rangelands can meet the needs of livestock permittees. Grazing will continue to be a valued use of resources on the Routt National Forest. The amount of suitable rangelands in Alternative C should accommodate livestock needs, while maintaining healthy herds of elk and deer and protecting other wildlife habitat, particularly fragile riparian areas and wetlands.

In Alternative C, 1,084,700 acres of the Forest will be available for oil and gas leasing. Over 50% of these acres have additional stipulations beyond those found in the standard lease terms. Over the next 20 years, we are projecting a maximum of 601 acres of disturbance from oil and gas leasing activities. For more information on standard lease terms and resource protection stipulations, see Appendix E of the FEIS.

Alternative C provides for a broad spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities. Wilderness and backcountry prescriptions emphasize the more primitive end of the spectrum, while developed campgrounds and scenic byways and ski areas emphasize the less primitive aspects of recreation.

Decision 5. Establishment of Requirements for Monitoring and Evaluating the Implementation of the Revised Plan to Meet the Requirements of 36 CFR 219.11 (d).

A key feature of all alternatives is the monitoring plan (Chapter 4, Revised Plan). Monitoring and its adaptive management principles are a cornerstone of ecosystem management. They allow us to be responsive to changing circumstances and changes in the available science and technology. The result is a dynamic, rather than a static, Forest Plan. Forest staff have developed monitoring questions to help ensure that this Revised Plan is working. A key element of this strategic monitoring is the preparation of a detailed Annual Monitoring Plan of Operations which will identify how the broad monitoring questions will be answered each year. The Annual Monitoring Plan for 1998 is available for your review.

Implementation of the monitoring requirements in the 1983 Plan revealed some shortcomings in the approach. The 1983 monitoring plan was detailed, specific, and lacked flexibility. It focused on quantifying outputs rather than using qualitative assessment to determine how well the Forest Plan was working. In the development of the Revised Plan, the monitoring focus shifted from specific activities to broad programmatic requirements. These broad requirements satisfy the regulatory provisions and are responsive to the forest plan goals and objectives. Because the requirements are flexible and adaptable, they allow new knowledge and techniques to be easily incorporated into the monitoring plan.

The Monitoring and Evaluation Chapter in the Revised Plan identifies the legally required monitoring activities; the action, effect, or resource to be measured; the monitoring schedule; and the level of precision or reliability. Also listed are additional monitoring activities to be conducted based on funding and personnel availability.

This Revised Plan will ensure that the Forest is healthy, now and in the future. I have placed emphasis on monitoring, and I am confident that the Forest will comply with these requirements.

Decision 6. Recommendations Regarding Additions to the Wilderness Preservation System.

One of the reasons I am selecting Alternative C for implementation is that it recommends no additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. The basis for my decision is the analysis presented in the FEIS. Disclosure of this decision is consistent with the requirements of 36 CFR 219.17.

I know that some people may be disappointed with this decision because they feel that wilderness designation offers the highest level of protection for roadless areas. While this may be true, there are other factors to consider. Currently, about 19% (250,400 acres) of the Routt National Forest is designated wilderness. Ecosystems in the greater ecological Province are generally well-represented by the existing wilderness areas in Region 2. The demand for backcountry recreation experiences can be satisfied using our available nonwilderness options. Approximately 67% (339,000 acres) of the roadless acres on the Routt National Forest are allocated to prescriptions which generally retain their roadless characteristics. If needed, these roadless areas can be recommended for designation as wilderness in the future. Finally, many of the people we talked to (locally and regionally) do not support additional wilderness designations. They feel that the backcountry prescription provides protection for roadless areas while keeping future management options open.

During the forest plan revision process, we updated our roadless inventory. The updated inventory takes the place of the RARE II inventory. It will be used for all related Forest Plan implementation activities and is the official Routt National Forest Roadless Inventory. This information is included in Chapter 3 and in Appendix C of the FEIS.

The Forest has identified 5 rivers or streams as eligible for wild or scenic designation. Two rivers, the Elk and the Encampment, were previously found suitable, and I will continue to recommend them for designation. The three streams, Rock Creek, Roaring Fork/Red Canyon, and the North Platte, will be managed under a wild or scenic river prescription until such time as a suitability analysis is completed. At that time, the river segment will either be recommended to Congress for designation, or it will be managed under the prescriptions of the lands adjacent to the area. Please note that eligibility will not affect the existing negotiated agreements with local water users.

By selecting Alternative C, I am designating three Research Natural Areas: Kettle Lakes (6,464 acres), Mad Creek (12,580 acres), and Silver Creek (12,421 acres). These RNAs are an important factor in my decision. I dropped two proposed RNAs and decreased the size of another based on public comments and additional analysis found in the planning record. The Kettle Lakes, Mad Creek, and Silver Creek RNAs represent a range of vegetation types and topographic features that have not been heavily influenced by humans. Timber harvest is prohibited in these areas, and there are some restrictions to livestock grazing. Recreation use will continue with few restrictions. We have worked hard to design an RNA system which minimizes the loss of other potential uses. The three RNAs selected have a negligible impact on commodity or recreational use. These three RNAs, combined with other RNAs in the

Region, ensure that research and education opportunities will be available in the future across a wide range of ecosystems.

After the comment period for the DEIS closed, we received input concerning a possible Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) violation in our analysis of potential RNAs. We carefully considered this information and prepared a document titled "Research Natural Area (RNA) Establishment Through the Forest Plan Revision Process on the Routt National Forest." This document is part of the record. At my request, staff from the Regional Office and the Routt National Forest thoroughly reviewed this issue. Based upon this review and discussion with staff, I am satisfied that there has been no violation of FACA. In addition, the designation of RNAs has produced no public injury because the interdisciplinary team critically reviewed information relating to proposed RNAs, made documents available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act, and held public meetings. The public also retains the right to evaluate my decision through the administrative appeal process and judicial review.

Despite the length of the forest plan revision process, this FACA issue was not raised until after the comment period closed. One of the primary purposes of a public involvement process is to inform the agency, in a timely manner, of substantive and procedural problems so corrections can be made at an early date.

Factors Considered in This Decision

The selection of Alternative C meets all statutory and legal requirements and adheres to applicable policies and manual and handbook direction governing forest plan development and the management of National Forest lands. Adherence to these laws, policies, and direction ensures protection of the basic resources (air, soil, and water).

Issues, concerns, and comments on the DEIS and proposed Revised Plan received particular consideration in the decision-making process. The environmental consequences of the Revised Plan and the other alternatives have been studied thoroughly. Alternatives are described and compared in Chapter 2 of the FEIS. Environmental consequences are discussed in Chapter 3.

Financial and economic analysis was also performed on each alternative. This analysis showed that Alternative C does not have the highest Present Net Value (PNV). However, I am confident that Alternative C ranks highest in terms of net public benefits. As explained in the FEIS, net public benefits are more than just PNV. There are many outputs and effects (biological diversity, visual amenities, watershed health, etc.) that are more difficult to quantify. These other factors must be taken into consideration in selecting the alternative with the highest net public benefits. Alternative C does the best job at balancing the trade-offs for competing uses, values, costs, and outputs. Alternative C produces the highest net public benefits.

In making this decision, I also considered the five revision topics and the four priorities developed from the revision topics.

1. Ensuring the long-term health of the land.

This is my highest priority. I looked at the standard and guidelines in the Forest Plan the mix of management area prescriptions, and the environmental consequences disclosed in the FEIS to see how each alternative responded to issues such as forest health; biological diversity; wildlife habitat effectiveness; habitat fragmentation; threatened, endangered, and sensitive species populations; noxious weeds; RNAs; and riparian and watershed health. I conclude that ensuring long-term health of the land requires a balance between active management of ecosystems, through timber harvest and prescribed burning, and a more passive approach where natural processes have more

influence on ecosystems and their functions. I believe that Alternative C provides that balance.

2. Implementing a balanced program featuring a sustainable output of multiple uses.

As noted earlier, the Routt National Forest is known for its relatively undeveloped character and its ability to produce goods and services needed by society. Alternative C manages 19% of the Forest in wilderness and an additional 24% in prescriptions such as backcountry recreation, eligible wild and scenic rivers, SIAs, and RNAs. Much of the Routt will continue to be undeveloped. Alternative C also has an ASQ of 148 MMBF of conifer and 20 MMBF of aspen, for a total of 168 MMBF per decade on 357,821 suitable acres; identifies 1,140,766 acres suitable for livestock grazing; identifies 1,084,700 acres as suitable and available for oil and gas leasing; produces 1,607,300 acre/feet of water annually; and has a world-class ski area and opportunities for a wide range of recreational pursuits. Thus the Routt National Forest will also continue to provide the goods and services needed by our society.

3. Continuing the emphasis on high-quality dispersed recreation opportunities.

While the Forest has a world-class ski area and many developed campgrounds, it is best known for its dispersed recreation. The Forest has 1900 miles of roads, including several scenic highways, and almost 200 miles of trail available for motorized use. There are 730 miles of trail open to nonmotorized uses, including 277 miles of wilderness trails. High populations of deer and elk make the Forest a destination for hunters and photographers from all over the country. Alternative C continues to emphasize high-quality dispersed recreation with its mix of management area allocations and standards and guidelines.

4. Being a good neighbor to the people and communities who rely on and value the Forest.

The Forest Service has an interdependent relationship with local communities. Many individuals who live in and near the Forest rely on it for economic opportunities and for other values, such as scenery and recreational opportunity, that contribute to a cherished way of life. We will continue to be a good neighbor to these people and their communities. Alternative C provides for a sustainable level of timber harvest, identifies lands where livestock grazing and oil and gas leasing can continue, makes water available for local needs, and provides opportunities for recreational uses that bring in significant revenues to local businesses.

Alternative C also protects the health of the Forest, the scenic quality, the wildlife habitat, and the recreational opportunities that make the area an attractive place to live and work. Through the use of Management Area Prescription 7.1 - Residential/Forest Interface, the alternative I am selecting puts special emphasis on managing areas where residential developments adjoin the Forest so as to protect the values that initially drew people to these areas.

Providing all these benefits locally will not be at the expense of those who care about the Routt National Forest but do not live nearby. Alternative C represents a balanced program of management that ensures the long-term health of the land while providing sustainable outputs of multiple uses. As such it also allows a

balance to exist between the needs and desires of those who live in or near the Forest and the wishes of those who live elsewhere.

Science is also a factor in my decision. There are many facets to consider here. One is the use of biological science as it applies to the management of National Forests. Another is the application of social science, since people are an integral part of ecosystems. Science does not always provide clear answers to complex resource management topics. But it does give insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. These scientific findings are displayed in the FEIS. In integrating the biological and social sciences, I considered the following:

- The role of the Routt National Forest in the greater ecological province and sections, as outlined in Appendix D of the FEIS.
- The role of fire, insects, and disease in ecosystem dynamics.
- Access to the Forest and to the facilities available to the public.
- Negotiated water agreements.
- The plans, goals, and policies of other government agencies (local, state, and national) and Indian tribes.
- The role the Routt National Forest plays in local, regional, and national economies.
- The literature review and the results of it in the analysis of the alternatives.

The alternatives were developed and analyzed based on the interaction between the revision topics, these additional factors, and the information in the FEIS. I chose Alternative C because of the balance it provides between ensuring that the Forest maintains its contribution to the ecology of the southern Rockies, and honoring the interdependencies among the Forest, other agencies, local governments, and local, regional, and national economies. The goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines contained in the selected alternative reflect this balance by safeguarding the integrity of ecological processes while providing for multiple uses and benefits.

Changes Between Draft and Final

We made several changes between the publication of the DEIS and the publication of the final documents. These changes included:

1. Updating the Rocky Mountain Resource Information System (RMRIS) database.
2. Rerunning FORPLAN and benchmarks and performing additional sensitivity analysis. More information is presented in Appendix B of the FEIS. The following is a partial list of changes to the FORPLAN model:
 - Updated the timber price using a new four-year average. The four-year average is based on timber revenues for fiscal years 1993 through 1996. A four-year period was used because that is the amount of time allowed to harvest a sale.
 - Maximized the timber output in Alternative E.

- Constrained the Alternative C budget. The budget was only allowed to exceed the average budget for the period 1992 - 1994 by 30%.
 - Updated and re-ran all timber yield tables, resulting in lower yields than in the DEIS.
3. Reducing RNAs in Alternative C from five to three based on additional analysis and public comment.
 4. Updating, reviewing, and coordinating the standards and guidelines.
 5. Making changes in management area allocations for Alternative C based on additional analysis and public comment.
 6. Clarifying the desired future condition statements.
 7. Considering and incorporating public comments and management concerns.
 8. Adding FEIS Appendix K which documents public comments on the DEIS and proposed Revised Plan and our responses to those comments.
 9. Standards from the WCP Handbook (FSH 2509.25) were added to Chapter 1 of the Revised Plan.

In the change from draft to final, the projected timber value went from \$89.39 MBF (DEIS) to \$153.15 MBF (FEIS). The change in timber price has an effect on the ASQ for all alternatives except F, where timber harvest is at a minimal level due to allocation. Under the higher revenue value in the FEIS, timber harvest became more economical and the entry into roadless areas more feasible. The effect of price on ASQ is explained in Appendix B in the DEIS and the FEIS. The sensitivity analysis in the DEIS indicated timber price had a large effect on the ASQ (see Appendix B, DEIS).

For Alternative C, changes to the FORPLAN model resulted in an increase in ASQ from 131 MMBF of conifer per decade to 148 MMBF of conifer per decade. This ASQ for Alternative C in the FEIS is within the range of alternatives considered in the DEIS.

Information from the Colorado Natural Heritage Program was provided just prior to the release of the DEIS and Proposed Revised Plan. This information was not used in actual development of the Alternatives. Effects to these Preliminary Conservation Planning Areas were displayed in Appendix D of the DEIS. Further analysis as discussed in Appendix D of the FEIS showed that these areas were most appropriately analyzed at the site specific level rather than within the context of the programmatic decisions made with the Forest Plan.

Alternative C, as described in the FEIS, is a refinement of the Alternative C described in the DEIS. It is a logical outgrowth of our analysis and public involvement efforts. This revised alternative is well within the range of alternatives the public would expect the Forest Service to consider. The differences in Alternative C between draft and final are not substantial, and they resulted in relatively minor changes to the environmental consequences disclosed in the DEIS. Therefore, no supplement to the EIS is required.

Taking into account the guidelines in 40 CFR 1502.9 (c) (1) and Forest Service Handbook 1909.15(18.1) for new information, I have considered the October 25, 1997 wind storm that caused the blowdown of trees in a 20,000 acre area of the Routt National Forest. This event does not represent significant new information that would require me to supplement this analysis for the following reasons:

1. The affected blowdown area acreage is less than 1.5% of the 1,358,600 acres that make up the analysis area.
2. It does not change the strategic nature or context of this forest plan revision or the six decisions made.
3. It does not change the scope of the alternatives, environmental impacts, and the actions considered in the DEIS.

This determination has been made based on the interdisciplinary analysis of the blowdown event and documented in a Supplemental Information Report which is a part of the Administrative Record for this forest plan revision. Therefore, no supplement to the EIS is required.

Findings Required by Other Laws

As the Acting Regional Forester (deciding officer), I have considered the multitude of statutes governing management of the Routt National Forest, and I believe that this decision represents the best possible approach to reconciling the current statutory duties of the Forest Service.

The Routt Forest Plan is in compliance with the Clean Water Act because of the conclusions presented in Chapter 3, Aquatic Resources section of the FEIS.

The Routt Forest Plan is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act because of the conclusions presented in Chapter 3, Heritage Resource section of the FEIS.

The Routt Forest Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act because of the conclusions presented in Chapter 3, Biological diversity - Fine Filter section of the FEIS and Appendix J of the FEIS. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concurs with our determination that this decision is not likely to adversely affect federally listed species.

The Routt Forest Plan is in compliance with the Clean Air Standards because of the conclusions presented in Chapter 3, Air Resources section of the FEIS.

Identification of the Environmentally Preferred Alternative

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations require agencies to specify the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable [40 CFR 1505.2(b)]. Although Alternative F would allow the fewest ground-disturbing activities (the traditional measure of the environmentally preferred alternative), I am identifying the selected Alternative C as environmentally preferable based on the following interpretation of the law and agency policy.

According to Forest Service policy, the environmentally preferred alternative is the alternative that best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA. Section 101 emphasizes the protection of the environment for future generations; the preservation of historic, cultural, and natural resources; and attainment of the widest range of beneficial uses.

Public comments were divided over which alternative was best for the environment. I chose to focus on the goals set forth in NEPA to select the environmentally preferred alternative. The goals of Section 101 are similar to the principles of ecosystem management and of this Revised Plan, calling for sustainable and balanced use and making provision for future generations. Section 101 does not exclude Americans from use of their natural resources but does demand that such uses avoid degradation of the environment.

Section 101 of NEPA defines national environmental policy, calling upon federal, state, and local governments and the public to create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony. This broad policy is further defined in six goals:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustees of the environment for succeeding generations.

Alternative C ensures the health of the land by balancing active management with the utilization of natural ecological processes. Alternative C includes standards and guidelines which preserve the health of basic resources, such as soil, air, and water. Roadless characteristics are retained on 339,000 acres by allocating those acres to backcountry prescriptions. An additional 260,000 acres are retained as wilderness. Alternative C provides a sustainable level of resource production. Timber and range management activities partially emulate natural disturbances. This helps strengthen forest and range plant vigor and increases resistance to insect and disease outbreaks. Alternative C was evaluated for its long-term (5 decades) impacts rather than just short-term consequences.

2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings.

Alternative C provides many opportunities for quality visitor experiences. Standards and guidelines are in place to ensure clean water, clean air, and visually pleasing surroundings.

3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences.

Alternative C provides a wide range of beneficial uses, such as timber production, livestock use, downhill skiing, dispersed and developed recreation, clean air and water, and oil and gas development. Standards and guidelines ensure these uses do not result in undesirable or unintended consequences.

4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our natural heritage and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice.

The mix of management area allocations in Alternative C preserves the historic and natural aspects of the Forest and provides a variety of individual choices. Standards and guidelines ensure compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as well as access for the disabled.

5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.

Alternative C achieves a balance between resource use and protection. Resource uses are sustainable and contribute to a high standard of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities.

6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

The standards and guidelines in Alternative C provide quality resource management. Timber harvest areas will be reforested promptly. Forest health will be enhanced. Sustainable resource production will contribute to the vitality of local communities.

After considering Section 101 of NEPA and the alternatives evaluated in the FEIS, I find that Alternative C best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA and is, therefore, the environmentally preferred alternative.

Implementation

Implementation of this ROD will occur 30 calendar days after the legal notice of this decision is published in the Federal Register.

Under NFMA, "permits, contracts, and other instruments for the use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands are required to be "consistent" with the current Land and Resource Management Plan. However, this requirement is not absolute. In the plan revision context, NFMA specifically qualifies the requirement in three ways: 1) these documents must be revised only "when necessary," 2) these documents must be revised "as soon as practicable," and 3) any revisions are "subject to valid existing rights." This language allows the decision maker a great deal of latitude.

In developing this Revised Plan, implementing pre-existing decisions and the associated effects of that implementation were considered part of the baseline against which the alternatives were evaluated. Because we considered these earlier decisions in our effects analysis, their implementation is not in conflict with the Revised Plan.

Exercising my discretion under NFMA, I have determined that it is not "necessary" to apply the Revised Plan's standards and guidelines retroactively, and I find that NFMA does not require revision of these pre-existing use and occupancy authorizations. The law generally does not favor retroactive application of new rules. However, I have also determined that I have the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations if they are not consistent with newly established standards, including the standards and guidelines in the Revised Plan. Use and occupancy agreements which might require modification of pre-existing authorization include those for timber harvesting and livestock grazing.

Most timber sale decisions are implemented through a three-year contract. While a timber sale contract is a valid existing right, the terms of the contract allow modification. Therefore, modification of a timber contract under its terms would not violate the "valid existing right" provision. Having clarified this point, I have nevertheless decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts. As I stated earlier, we assumed that these contracts would be executed according to their terms. Finally, existing timber contracts will generally have been completed within three years. I find it reasonable to allow pre-existing standards to remain in effect for that period of time. Having said this, I leave it to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are for a substantially longer term than timber contracts. For example, grazing permits are generally issued for a ten-year term. My discretionary decision is to require grazing permits to comply with the Revised Plan's standards and guidelines. The case law is clear that grazing permits are privileges rather than rights, and they

are subject to modification by their terms and under the grazing regulations. The Forest is presently under a separate statutory mandate (Rescission Act, Public Law 104-19, Section 504; July 27, 1995) to schedule and complete NEPA analysis for all grazing allotments. The Forest has scheduled the required analyses, and I find that applying the Revised Plan's standards and guidelines through this process will meet the "as soon as practicable" provision.

Other classes of "use and occupancy" agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise his discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan.

The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed above, these activities are site-specific and require analysis and disclosure of effects under NEPA. These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Plan. This ROD does not make any site-specific decisions.

Forest Plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, the occurrence of certain activities. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data, and assumptions. More information on the difference between programmatic and site specific projects can be found in the planning record (Overview of Forest Planning and Project Level Decisionmaking, Gippert, OGC, July 1997, <http://www.fs.fed.us/forum/nepa/decisionm/index.html>) which is incorporated into this ROD by reference.

All activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by annual budgets. However, the desired future conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area prescriptions described in the Revised Plan may not change unless the Plan is amended.

The Plan will be amended or revised to adjust to changing circumstances. The amendment process gives us the flexibility to adapt the decisions made today to the realities of tomorrow. We will involve you in future changes to the Revised Plan.

Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR 217. A written appeal of this decision must be filed in duplicate within 90 days of the date of the published legal notice. Appeals must be filed with:

Chief, USDA Forest Service
14th and Independence, S.W.
201 14th Street, Washington, DC 20250

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Office.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.

- The reasons for objection, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Requests to stay implementation of the Revised Forest Plan will not be granted [36 CFR 217.10(b)].

Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in this Revised Forest Plan. Final decisions on proposed projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with NEPA and are subject to appeal at that time.

For questions concerning the Appeal process, contact:

USDA Forest Service
Attn: Ecosystem Management Staff (Steve Segovia)
P.O. Box 96090
Washington, D.C. 20090-6090
(202) 205-1066

For questions concerning the Forest Plan, contact:

Jerry E. Schmidt
Forest Supervisor
Medicine Bow-Routt National Forest
2468 Jackson St.
Laramie, Wyoming 82070

Reviewers are encouraged to contact the Forest Supervisor before submitting appeals to determine if misunderstandings or concerns can be clarified or resolved.

Conclusion

I am pleased to announce this decision and bring this phase of the Forest Plan revision to completion. The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together. Together we can meet the challenges, realize the opportunities, and achieve the goals and objectives of this Revised Plan.

The Revised Plan is our strategic plan for ensuring the long-term health of the land. We will use adaptive management as we work to implement it. We will carefully monitor our activities, the condition of the land, the goods and services produced, and the effectiveness of the resource protection measures included in the Revised Plan to ensure a healthy forest for the next generation.

TOM L. THOMPSON /s/Tom L. Thompson

Date 2/17/98

Acting Regional Forester