Preface

Understanding the Revised Plan

Background

The term "forest plan" used in this document refers to forest land and resource management plans in general. The term "1983 Plan" refers to the Routt National Forest's forest plan that was signed in 1983. The term "Revised Plan" refers to this document.

Forest plans are prepared in accordance with the 1976 National Forest Management Act (NFMA), the 1969 National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and other laws and regulations. The Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1983 Plan) was issued in November 1983. The NFMA regulations state that a forest plan should ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years (36 CFR 219.10).

The Routt National Forest has prepared this Revised Plan and accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). The public had 120 days to comment on the Proposed Revised Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). After the comments were evaluated and the necessary changes made, this Revised Plan, FEIS, and Record of Decision (ROD) were issued. With signature of the ROD, the Revised Plan replaces the 1983 Plan.

Purpose of the Revised Plan

A forest plan provides guidance for all resource management activities on a National Forest.

1. It establishes forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives. [36 CFR 219.11(b)]
2. It establishes forest-wide standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604 applying to future activities and the resource integration requirements found in 36 CFR 219.13 through 219.27.
3. It establishes management area direction (management area prescriptions) applying to future activities in a management area (resource integration and minimum, specific management requirements). [36 CFR 219.11(c)]
4. It designates lands as suited or not suited for timber production [16 USG 1604(k)] or other resource management activities. (36 CFR 219.14, 219.15, 219.20, and 219.21)
5. It establishes monitoring and evaluation requirements. [36 CFR 219.11(d)]
6. It provides recommendations to Congress for the establishment of wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, and other special designations, as appropriate.

Forest plans estimate future management activities, but the actual amount of activities accomplished is determined by annual budgets and site-specific project decisions. Because budgets rarely provide enough money to fully implement a forest plan, scheduled activities and actions must be adjusted to match available funds. While budget changes do not require forest plan amendments, the implications of those changes may.

Relationship of the Revised Plan to Other Documents

Alternatives are described and analyzed in the FEIS. The Revised Plan gives the technical direction for implementing the selected alternative (Alternative C) identified in the ROD.

The Revised Plan is consistent with the amended Rocky Mountain Regional Guide 1992 which provides strategic direction for the Forest Service, Rocky Mountain Region.

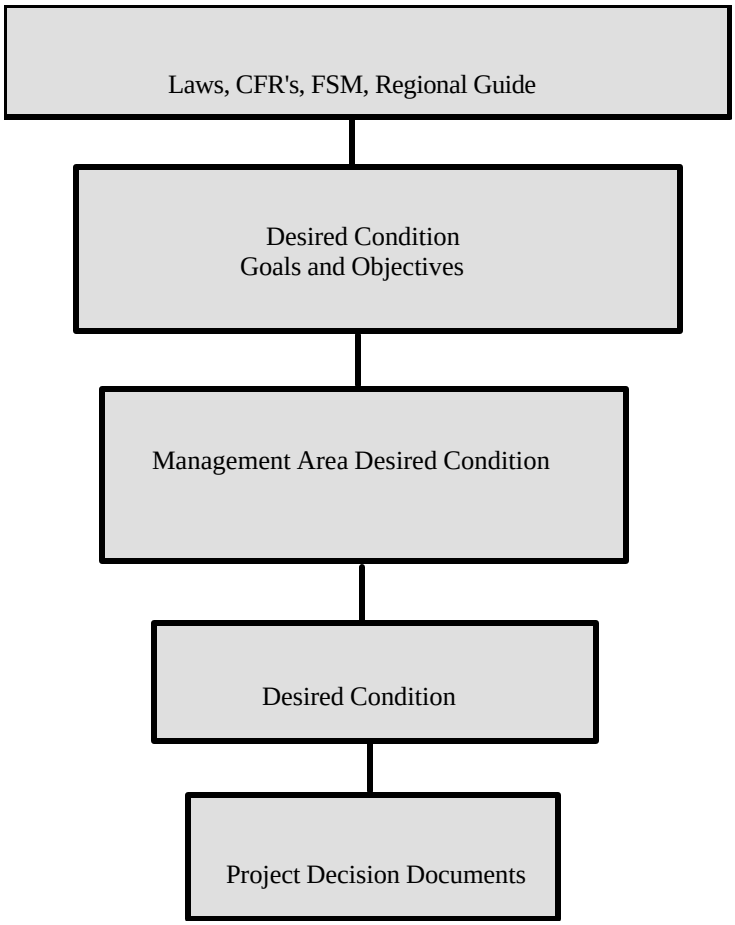
Integration with Forest Service Directives System

The public often identifies issues that are covered in Forest Service manuals and handbooks. The Revised Plan supplements direction found in the manuals and handbooks. Appendices A and B summarize key direction already found in the manuals and handbooks. Neither the key direction in Appendix A and B nor other direction found in the directive system needs to be repeated in the Plan. All Plan implementation activities must be in accordance with the Revised Plan, and the directive system activities must also be in accordance with laws and regulations.

Hierarchy of Management Direction

Direction for management of National Forest System Lands comes from a variety of levels. National and regional direction includes laws, regulations, Forest Service Manuals, and the Regional Guide.

The following chart illustrates the hierarchy of management direction beginning with national and regional direction at the highest level and ending with site-specific, project-level direction when the Revised Plan is implemented.



A Reader's Guide to the Revised Plan

This document contains the Preface, the Revised Plan, and Appendices. Accompanying the Revised Plan is an FEIS and a map package.

The Preface provides background information, describes how the Revised Plan is implemented through project decision-making, and describes forest plan amendment and revision procedures.

The Revised Plan section describes management direction for the Forest. Chapter 1 includes the goals and objectives and forest-wide standards and guidelines. Chapter 2 contains the management area prescription standards and guidelines. Chapter 3 describes the geographic areas with a location map of each. Chapter 4 discusses the monitoring and evaluation process.

The Appendices contain detailed information which may be helpful in understanding or implementing the Plan and are as follows:

Appendix A: Related National Goals

Appendix B: Key National and Regional Policies

Appendix C: Relevant Federal and State Statutes, Regulations, and Executive Orders

Appendix D: Implementation

Appendix E: Oil and Gas Leasing Stipulations

Appendix F: Lands

Implementation of the Forest Plan

A forest plan provides the framework to guide the day-to-day land and resource management operations of a National Forest. Other guidance is summarized in Appendices A, B, and C.

The Forest Plan is a strategic, programmatic document that does not make project-level decisions. Those decisions are made after more detailed analysis and further public comment. NFMA requires that resource plans and permits, contracts, and other instruments issued for the use and occupancy of National Forest System lands be consistent with the forest plan. The following are some examples of project decisions that require more detailed environmental analysis:

- Timber harvesting and related activities, such as slash disposal and road construction.
- Range allotment management plans.
- Fish or wildlife habitat improvement projects.
- Watershed improvement projects.
- Decisions for winter-sports development, outfitter/guide proposals, and other externally generated projects involving occupancy and use of National Forest System lands.

Resource inventories, action plans, and schedules are not binding decisions and do not require additional environmental analysis at the project level.

Public involvement is a key part of implementing the forest plan. Monitoring and evaluation reports are available annually for public review.

Forest Plan Amendment and Revision

Forest Plan Amendment

During plan implementation, evaluation of monitoring results may reveal that the Forest Plan needs to be changed. Changes are made by amending the Forest Plan (36 CFR 219.10(f)).

Forest Plan Revision

The Forest Supervisor is required to review the conditions of the land at least every 5 years to determine if a revision is necessary. If monitoring and evaluation indicate that immediate changes in the Forest Plan are needed, and these needed changes cannot be handled in an amendment, then revision of the Plan becomes necessary. The Regional Forester is the official responsible reviewing and approving Forest Plan Revisions.

Understanding the Routt National Forest

The Routt National Forest occupies a unique setting in northwest Colorado. The location map is shown below. The Forest is between two internationally recognized destination sites - Rocky Mountain National Park and Dinosaur National Monument. The continental divide follows the Park Range from the Wyoming border to Rabbit Ears Pass. Portions of the Forest are within the boundaries of Garfield, Grand, Jackson, Moffat, Rio Blanco, and Routt Counties. Denver is the nearest metropolitan center, located approximately 150 miles southeast of Steamboat Springs.

Physical Environment

The Routt National Forest has 1,125,568 acres of National Forest System land. The Routt also administers an additional 113,832 acres of Arapaho-Roosevelt National Forest System lands. The Williams Fork watershed (104,744 acres located on the Arapaho-Roosevelt) is included in this Revised Plan, but is managed by the Arapaho-Roosevelt. Approximately 20% of the Routt National Forest is designated wilderness.

The Forest has diverse topography consisting of high plateaus, rolling foothills, and mountains. Precipitation amounts and patterns vary greatly due to the topographic differences. Measured average annual precipitation ranges from 9.7 inches east of the Continental Divide at Walden to 67.4 inches west of the Continental Divide in the North Fork of the Fish Creek drainage. The climate can be summarized by the statement "long, snowy winters and short, cool summers." Elevations exceed 13,000 feet in some areas.

The north-south Park Range and its southern extension, the Gore Range, split the Forest near its center. The Flat Tops, a series of high elevation plateaus, are located in the southwest portion of the Forest. In the northwest are the Elkhead Mountains. Separating North Park from Middle Park is the east-west Rabbit Ears Range. The Medicine Bow Range forms the boundary of the Forest in the northeast. The southeast boundary is formed by the Williams Fork Mountains and the Front Range. The headwaters of the North Platte River and the Yampa River originate entirely on the Forest. The Middle Park area feeds into the upper Colorado River.

Biological Environment

The Routt National Forest lies within two ecological sections - the North Central Highlands Section and the Northern Parks and Range Section.

About 78% of the Forest is classified as forested. Most of the forested land is composed of spruce/fir, lodgepole pine, and aspen. Most of the Forest (60%) is in a mature condition.

The nonforested land makes up about 22% of the Forest. It includes grassy meadows, shrubs such as sagebrush and oakbrush, and rock/talus slopes.

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

Social and Economic Environment

People and communities are tied to the Forest in many ways. Forest management is of concern to people living in communities near the Forest, as well as those using the Forest. Proximity to forest resources, such as scenery, wildlife, and clean water, is what makes many Front Range communities desirable places to visit and live.

People are part of the ecosystem. The inclusion of the human dimension in ecosystem management recognizes that people's needs, uses, and attitudes affect all forest resources. The human objective in ecosystem management can be defined as "seeking to understand human demands on, values and perceptions of, and interactions with ecosystems and to integrate those into policy, programs, and management."

Managing ecosystems on a sustainable basis means weighing all the components to produce what people value, while not pre-empting the options of future generations. Under an ecosystem management approach, outputs are produced to meet society's needs, but

emphasis is placed on ecological processes and functions and ecosystem capabilities, sustainability, and health.

For the past 20 years, economies have been changing from a long-term dependence on agriculture, and in some cases mining, to a high degree of dependence on recreation and tourism. The 1990 Farm Act authorized the Forest Service to help rural communities identify ways to diversify their economies. The Routt National Forest has provided assistance through rural development grants to the towns of Kremmling and Walden and to Carbon County.

Summary of the Analysis of the Management Situation and Demand and Supply Conditions

Following is a brief summary of the analysis of the management situation, including demand and supply conditions for resource commodities and services, production potential, and use and development opportunities within the Routt National Forest [36 CFR 219.11(a)]. This information was derived from the accompanying Final Environmental Impact Statement.

Recreation

The Forest offers a wide variety of recreation opportunities, with an emphasis on dispersed recreation. There are 260,000 acres of designated wilderness and an additional 500,000 inventoried roadless acres. There are 922 miles of trails, most of which are available to hikers, horseback riders, and mountain bikers. Over half of the 1,900 miles of roads are open to motorized public use. There are several developed campgrounds and trailheads. A world class ski area is located on Forest System lands just outside the town of Steamboat Springs. Other major recreational activities include hunting and snowmobiling.

Dispersed Recreation

Approximately 75% of the recreation that occurs on the Forest is dispersed, meaning there are no constructed facilities. An increasing demand for trails and scenic resources that provide opportunities for day hiking, backpacking, horseback riding, sightseeing and pleasure driving, photography, and wildlife observation is projected (Cordell, et. al., 1993).

Developed Recreation

Developed recreation includes all recreation activities that take place on developed recreation sites (those sites with constructed facilities). The combined seasonal capacity of all developed sites is 3.7 million visitors, 2.4 million of whom are associated with winter use at the ski area. Use in developed facilities is currently at or above 40% of capacity and is expected to increase.

Locatable Minerals

Locatable minerals are those valuable deposits subject to exploration and development under the Mining Law of 1872 and its amendments. Approximately 35% of the Forest can be classified as having a high-to-moderate potential for locatable minerals.

Leasable Minerals

Currently, three wells are in production on the Forest. However, extensive oil and gas activity has occurred on lands adjacent to the Forest. Exploration and development for oil and natural gas is expected to increase over the coming years.

Timber Production

The timber demand assessment for the Forest was derived from a 1992 study by Douglas B. Rideout and Jennifer S. Stone requested by the Arapaho/Roosevelt National Forest. The timbershed identified in this study encompasses the following:

- Routt National Forest
- Eagle, Holy Cross, and Rifle Districts of the White River National Forest
- Medicine Bow National Forest, excluding the Laramie Peak area of the Douglas District
- Arapaho/Roosevelt National Forest

The supply and demand from the Routt National Forest can not be assessed without taking into account the supply and demand from the other forests in the timbershed. After determining the volume levels demanded by major processors, with an additional 10% for smaller operators, the timbershed demand level was estimated to be 70-75 million board-feet (MMBF) annually.

Since this study, the timber sawmill in Walden has closed. Rideout's study identified this sawmill as producing 16 MMBF annually on a single shift with a spike shift (a shift with additional people) producing 22 MMBF annually. The closing has increased demand at the mill in Saratoga. It is estimated that overall demand has decreased by 7 MMBF, resulting in a timbershed demand level of 65.5 MMBF annually.

Between 1987 and 1991, the Forest supplied 35% of the timbershed sawtimber. The Forest supplied about 45% of the sawtimber in 1995. To estimate the demand for sawtimber on the Forest, the percent supplied (45%) was multiplied by the timbershed demand level (65.5 MMBF) to arrive at a final demand estimate of 29.6 MMBF annually.

From 1985 to 1994, the Routt sold on average 18.2 MMBF/year. This indicates that the Forest has been supplying sawtimber below the demand level.

Livestock Grazing

Permits are required for livestock grazing on the Forest. During the past 10 years, numbers have fluctuated annually depending on economics and weather. In 1993, 10,700 head of cattle and 49,700 head of sheep grazed on the Forest. This is 83% and 69%, respectively, of the maximum number permitted.

Special Forest Products

The Plan allows the gathering or collection of special forest products such as herbs, mushrooms, rocks, small trees and shrubs, floral products, etc. on a case-by-case basis. Permits to collect these products are available from the Ranger Districts, upon request.

Forest Plan Data Sources

The information presented in the tables, figures, and maps in the following document was generated from a variety of sources. Sources include several different Geographic Information System (GIS) software platforms, data from oracle databases and spreadsheets, and data from the Forest Planning (FORPLAN) model. The acreage figures from the various sources do not match exactly. However when added, acres of National Forest Service lands (regardless of the source) are within 1% of the official land status acreage. For a more detailed, technical explanation of the data sources, please see the following discussion.

Most of the data residing in GIS was originally created in DWRIS (Distributed Wildland Resource Information System), a microcell grid-based GIS that operates on the Data General, the Forest Service's centralized computer system. Some of this data was transferred to vector layers in ARC/Info, a GIS operating on a unix-based workstation. Due to software and system considerations and original cell size in DWRIS, the data layers transferred to ARC/Info have a coarser resolution than some of the data layers that were subsequently created in ARC/Info. This difference in resolution results in differences in GIS-calculated acreages. The acres used in the FORPLAN model were generated in DWRIS.

The Revised Plan and FEIS also contain data from the Rocky Mountain Resource Information System (RMRIS) oracle database. This database contains homogeneous site information for a variety of vegetative and land characteristics, such as tree type, habitat structural stage, elevation, and acres. It has been in use since the early 1980s. The acres in RMRIS were calculated by hand (planimeter or dot grid) and mathematically balanced to match the Forest Service land status acres. Because the RMRIS acres were calculated using a different methodology, they are not an exact match for acres calculated in GIS. However acres of National Forest Service lands in all data sources are within 1% of the land status acres.