

## **Key Laws Governing Watershed Stewardship U.S. Forest Service**

### **Organic Administration Act of 1897** ([16 U.S.C. 475](#))

This law defines the original purposes of national forests – to improve and protect the forests, to furnish a continuous supply of timber, and to secure favorable conditions of water flows. Years of concern about watershed damage led to creation of the national forests. Watersheds must be cared for to sustain their watershed function as “sponge-and-filter” systems that store water and naturally regulate runoff. The goals are good plant and ground cover, streams in dynamic balance with their channels and flood plains, and natural conveyance of water and sediment.

### **Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act of 1960** ([16 U.S.C. 528](#))

This law amplifies national forest purposes to include watershed, wildlife and fish, outdoor recreation, range, and timber. Renewable surface resources must be managed for multiple use and sustained yield of the several products and services they provide. The principles of multiple use and sustained yield include the provision that land productivity shall not be impaired.

### **Endangered Species Act of 1973** ([16 U.S.C. 1531-36, 1538-40](#))

This law was written to conserve endangered and threatened species of wildlife, fish, plants, and the ecosystems on which they depend. Federal agencies must conserve endangered & threatened species in cooperation with state and local agencies. Conservation means using all means needed to recover species to where the measures provided pursuant to this law are no longer needed. Each agency shall ensure that actions are unlikely to jeopardize the continued existence of any endangered or threatened species or result in adverse modification of their critical habitat.

### **National Forest Management Act of 1976** ([16 U.S.C. 1600-02, 1604, 1606, 1608-14](#))

This law was written to guide forest planning and management. Programs must protect and, where appropriate, improve the quality of soil and water. Timber must be harvested only where soil, slope, and watershed conditions are not irreversibly damaged; the land can be adequately restocked within five years after harvest; and streams, lakes, wetlands, and other water bodies are protected from detrimental impacts.

### **Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976** ([43 U.S.C. 1752](#))

This law was written to guide management of national forests and grasslands. These lands must be managed to protect ecological, environmental, air, water resource, and other values, and provide food and habitat for fish, wildlife, and domestic animals. Rights-of-way and uses shall include terms and conditions to protect the environment, subject to valid existing rights.

### **Clean Water Act of 1977** ([33 U.S.C. 1251, 1254, 1323-24, 1329, 1342, 1344](#))

This series of laws was written to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation’s waters. The goal is to sustain the integrity of water quality and aquatic habitat so that waters of the United States (perennial and intermittent streams, lakes, wetlands, and their tributaries) will support diverse, productive, stable, aquatic ecosystems with a balanced range of aquatic habitats. The Forest Service must comply with water quality laws and rules like anyone else and must apply best management practices to protect water quality.