

USDA Forest Service



STATEMENT USDA Forest Service Washington, D.C.

Release No. FS- 0627s

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FINALIZED FOREST SERVICE RULE IMPROVES THE FOREST PLANNING PROCESS AND INCREASES PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

WASHINGTON, December 12, 2006 – The Forest Service has completed environmental review of the new process for developing and updating land management plans under regulations published last year. The environmental review has documented that writing management plans has no effect on the environment, which qualifies the individual plans of each National Forest for categorical exclusion from individual study under the National Environmental Policy Act. Further specific environmental study will be focused on each project that carries out the plan. This completes the final step in the overall revision of the Forest Service's planning process, which began in 2001.

The new rule improves the planning process by actively involving the public at every step. The Forest Service first collaborates with communities to identify how forests should improve in the future. The public participates throughout the process as plans are refined and finalized.

The rule establishes a dynamic process to account for changing forest conditions and assures that our national forests, grasslands, and prairies provide clean air, clean water, and abundant wildlife for future generations. It enables Forest Service experts to respond more rapidly to changing conditions, such as wildfires, and emerging threats, such as invasive species.

With the categorical exclusion, forest plan revisions will now take 2-3 years instead of over 5 years with the previous rule. Under the 2005 planning rule, full environmental analysis will continue at the project level where public involvement and the best available science can inform on the ground decision-making.

For more information:

http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/plan_ce/index.html

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