

Excerpts from 2003 Bitterroot National Forest - Forest Plan Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Emerging Issues and Changing Social Values Toward Forest Activities Item 27

OBJECTIVE: To identify emerging issues and changing social values toward Forest activities.

DATA SOURCE: Personal contacts, letters, meetings and other public comments, social assessments, surveys.

FREQUENCY: 100 percent annually.

REPORTING PERIOD: 1987 through 2003.

VARIABILITY: Any change in the major planning issues.

EVALUATION & MONITORING RESULTS:

The "Bitterroot NF Forest Plan, Five Year Review," completed in July 1994, provides findings and discussion on emerging issues that will need to be considered in updating the Forest Plan. Most findings are still considered relevant in 2003. The Post-fire Plan Review (2001) points out additional Plan revision issues.

Fire, Fuels, and People: In August 2000, President Clinton directed the Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior to develop a response to severe wildland fires, reduce fire impacts on rural communities, and ensure sufficient firefighting capacity in the future. Congress in turn mandated implementation of the resulting National Fire Plan through its appropriation actions and written direction. The National Fire Plan addresses conditions that have evolved over many decades and cannot be reversed in a single year. It is a long-term commitment based on cooperation and communication among federal agencies, states, local governments, tribes, and interested publics. The federal wildland fire management agencies worked in close consultation with states, governors, and interested partners to prepare a 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy for implementation of the National Fire Plan. More information on the National Fire Plan can be found at the internet site <http://www.fireplan.gov/>

President Bush proposed the Healthy Forests Initiative in August 2002, and directed federal agencies to develop several administrative and legislative tools to restore these ecosystems to healthy, natural conditions and assist in executing core components of the National Fire Plan. These tools will also move forward the Implementation Plan for the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy.

On December 3, 2003, President Bush signed the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003. [The Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 \(P.L. 108-148\)](#) contains a variety of provisions to expedite hazardous-fuel reduction and forest-restoration projects on specific types of Federal land that are at risk of wildland fire or insect and disease epidemics.

On a more local and site-specific basis, the Bitterroot fires and their effects on the communities continued to dominate local public discussions and interest in management of the Bitterroot National Forest. Many of these effects and community/National Forest issues have been documented in *Bitterroot Fires 2000, An Overview*, in the technical report *Bitterroot Fires 2000*, as well as in the Bitterroot National Forest Burned Area Recovery FEIS and ROD (2001).

The issue of reducing fuels, particularly within the wildland-urban interface has been an overriding public focus since the 2000 fires. The Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc. received a grant from the USDA Forest Service - State & Private Forestry to facilitate the development of a Community-based Wildland Fire Risk Mitigation Plan, or "Community Fire Plan" (<http://www.bitterrootfireplan.org/>). Diverse groups of valley residents met repeatedly during the winter of 2002-2003 to brainstorm and prioritize potential actions to address the most pressing issues that affect the Valley's ability to reduce the risks associated with wildland fires. The strategy is a cooperative effort of volunteer fire chiefs, county officials, conservationists, community-based non-profit organizations, realtors, tourism and timber industry leaders, federal and state land managers, business people and interested residents. The resulting Community Fire Plan reflects consensus among those who participated in its development and among those who, by signing, support the approaches outlined within. The protection of private homes and property in the interface is likely to be an important social and ecological consideration in Plan revision.

The National Fire Plan and Strategy, Healthy Forest Initiative, Ravalli Community Fire Plan, Bitterroot fire assessments and Burned Area Recovery ROD will continue to be used to guide short-term fire response and restoration priorities as well as to identify issues and topics that may need to be addressed in the upcoming Forest Plan revision.

Wilderness Dams: There are 16 privately owned dams within the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness (SBW). All of the dams were built prior to wilderness designation, and six were built prior to reservation of the national forest. While many of the issues surrounding management of these easements and special use authorizations are not new, several factors have increased the focus and controversy in recent years.

In managing the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness dams, Forest Service line officers have dual, and sometimes competing, responsibilities. They are required to protect the wilderness character while also ensuring, from a regulatory standpoint, that these dams are maintained in a safe condition. Dam owners, on the other hand, have certain rights and responsibilities for access, operation and maintenance of their facilities. Limits of line officer discretion and the reasonableness of conditions placed on access, operations, and reconstruction are constantly debated both internally and externally. As a result, consistent, predictable, and timely decisions are difficult to achieve. These issues may be explored further during the upcoming Forest Plan revision to see if additional programmatic direction would be helpful.

Research Note

Researchers from the Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute are working on a history of wilderness dams on the Bitterroot National Forest. They also are trying to develop understanding of the influences of natural resource management (including water resources) on quality of life of diverse segments of residents. They will develop and test hypotheses about the knowledge level of residents about the dams, awareness of the role wilderness water resources play in the Bitterroot Valley, attitudes toward maintenance methods of dams, and the relationship between quality of life and natural resource attributes of the Bitterroot Ecosystem.

Effects of National Forest Management on Adjacent Land and Communities Item 42

OBJECTIVE: To monitor the effects of National Forest management on adjacent land and communities (36 CFR 219.7 (f)).

DATA SOURCE: Interdisciplinary team review of management activities.

FREQUENCY: Annually.

REPORTING PERIOD: 2003

VARIABILITY: Eliminating effects would change National Forest outputs by five percent, or would change access.

EVALUATION:

National Forest management continues to be an integral part of Bitterroot Valley communities and to be important to people who derive products from the Forest or enjoy its scenic beauty, recreation opportunities, and other amenities. Approximately 73 percent of the land base in Ravalli County is National Forest System land. An additional 464,000 acres of the Bitterroot NF is in Idaho County, Idaho. The Magruder Corridor road extends through this county, between the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness and Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness.

The Bitterroot Forest Plan Five Year Review (July 1994) described the ongoing coordination among the Forest Service, other government agencies, the community, tribes, and the general public. These relationships are further described throughout this year's monitoring report and below.

Our activities and programs did not appear to have significant adverse effects on adjacent land and communities.

MONITORING RESULTS:

The following Bitterroot NF programs could have affected adjacent land and communities.

Air Quality Program. Outside the summer wildfire season, air quality standards continue to be met. The Forest Service is cooperating with BLM and the state on air quality monitoring in Western Montana (<http://smokemu.org/home.php>).

Bitterroot Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Bitterroot National Forest has been supporting and participating in the collaboratively developed Community Wildfire Protection Plan. The Bitter Root Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc. is facilitating the production and maintenance of the plan by a diverse group of valley residents and government agencies (<http://www.bitterrootfireplan.org/>).

Conservation Education. The Forest continues its involvement in school programs and community service groups to provide information on natural resources. Forest personnel provided over 200 presentations to a wide range of audiences in 2003. These included ninety-five indoor and 114 outdoor presentations. The presentations were part of a number of educational programs including weeds awareness, OHV ethics, wilderness skills, fire ecology, wildlife and fisheries, forestry, Lewis and Clark history, moonwalk series, special events and individualized requests. These programs reached over 9,100 individuals throughout the year including 4,404 students, 85 teachers, and 308 individuals from community organizations and youth groups.

Coordination - Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes and Nez Perce Tribe. The Forest Service and the Tribes consulted several times in FY2003. The Forest is fulfilling its desire to consult on projects, share information, and discuss issues and highlights. Refer to the Heritage Program monitoring section for more detail.

Coordination - Ravalli County. The Forest Service and Ravalli County continued to implement their memorandum of understanding by keeping one another informed on issues and coordinating in the areas of fire management, law enforcement, weed control, air and water quality, road management and maintenance, and planning efforts.

Dam Management. Management of dams for water storage continued throughout the year. The Forest has increased its emphasis on the monitoring, maintenance, and repair of the many aging private dams within our

boundaries. How the dams are managed has aesthetic, economic, safety, and ecological effects on lands and people in the Bitterroot Valley.

Fire and Fuel Management. The Forest continues to cooperate with other fire protection agencies in the area. The Forest is also actively working to reduce hazardous fuels, especially along National Forest boundaries with private lands (also known as the wildland/urban interface).

The Bitterroot National Forest, State and Private Forestry program, has been cooperatively working with the Bitterroot Resource Conservation and Development Area, Inc. (RC&D) in the treatment of hazardous fuels on private lands and National Forest lands immediately adjacent to the private lands. The Bitterroot National Forest Fire Management personnel have been providing expertise to the RC&D community forester when assisting private landowners to improve understanding of fire risk in areas that need fuels treatment. Please see the Fire Management section for more details.

Grazing There are 25 grazing allotments on the Bitterroot National Forest. Nineteen of these allotments were active in 2003 on approximately 9.8 percent of the Forest area.

Heritage Program. We continued to inventory cultural resources in FY2003 and protected known sites from effects of other activities. We actively coordinated and consulted with the Tribes.

Noxious Weeds. The Bitterroot National Forest continues in its efforts to control the spread of noxious weeds throughout the Forest and along Forest Service roads. We are working with other federal, state, county agencies to control these invaders throughout the Bitterroot Valley. Some residents adjacent to BNF lands have requested that the Forest Service treat noxious weeds, on adjacent National Forest lands, so as to enhance containment efforts on private lands. We are coordinating these efforts with the assistance of Ravalli County.

Roads. Under the Forest Road and Trail Act the Bitterroot NF trades road maintenance equally with Ravalli County. The Forest maintains some county roads and the county maintains some Forest Service roads depending on what is most efficient.

Rural Development Program. Bitterroot National Forest participation in the Rural Community Assistance Program increased dramatically after the fires of 2000 resulting in extensive financial and technical assistance to the people of Ravalli County this year.

Timber Program. The Forest offered 7.8 million board feet (MMBF) of timber for sale in FY2003. More detail is provided in Monitoring Item 11, and revenue information is summarized in the Forest Revenues section.

Trapper Creek Job Corps Center. The Trapper Creek Job Corps Center continued to provide services to local communities through their on-the-job training for skilled labor employment.

Wildlife, Watershed, and Botany Programs. Please refer to these sections for efforts in these areas. None of the activities resulted in adverse effects on adjacent lands or communities.

Research Note

The Aldo Leopold Wilderness Research Institute is developing quantitative descriptions of the relationships between community members and the Bitterroot landscape. This is called "place meanings." This information will help develop fuel treatment programs that reflect the social values of the local community.

Heritage Program

OBJECTIVES: Ensure compliance with Forest Plan standards for inventory, evaluation, preservation, and interpretation of cultural resources, and continue coordination with Native American tribal groups.

DATA SOURCE: Annual report by forest heritage program manager.

FREQUENCY: Annually.

REPORTING PERIOD: 2003

EVALUATION & MONITORING RESULTS:

The Bitterroot NF heritage program continued to strive for a balance of efforts including support for on-the-ground management activities, forest planning, tribal relations, and public outreach, as well as protection, maintenance and enhancement of the Forest's heritage properties.

In 2003, BNF heritage specialists provided input to a total of 47 projects. Overall, heritage specialists surveyed approximately 1,265 acres, excluding fieldwork associated with Burned Area Recovery implementation monitoring. Six new sites were recorded on the Forest – three historic irrigation ditches, an historic dam, a Forest Service lookout point, and one prehistoric site.

Over the past year, monitoring by heritage specialists determined that vandalism continues to be a problem at St. Mary's lookout, where both deliberate and inadvertent human-caused damage has occurred. The District and Forest have been doing some short term fixes and will be working with the regional preservation team to identify and implement some long term solutions. Off-trail OHV traffic has corroded two important archaeological sites. Measures were taken to deter OHV traffic over these locations in 2002 and 2003. The Forest will continue monitoring these sites to determine the effectiveness of the measures or identify if additional actions are needed.

In preparation for the approaching Lewis and Clark Bicentennial, the Bitterroot NF has identified three Lewis and Clark Trail segments on the Forest. They are the Lost Trail Pass/Saddle Mountain/Camp Creek area, the Gibbon's Pass Road area, and the Spring Gulch/Low Saddle area. Field inventory of these segments was completed in August 2002, with work underway on the final inventory report as well as a protection and monitoring plan.

During 2003, the Forest continued its ongoing lookout restoration program with four building or structure restoration projects. In April, the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team, working with heritage specialists and West Fork and Sula district personnel, completed restoration of the National Register-listed Blacky Foster Cabin. The second phase of stabilization work at Boulder Point Lookout on the West Fork District was undertaken in July 2003. This project, a partnership among the Forest Service, the West Fork Ski Club, the National Forest Foundation, and the Forest Fire Lookout Association, is aimed at preserving the historic lookout and eventually restoring it for participation in the public cabin rental program. (Gird Point Lookout, restored in 2001-2002, was officially added to the rental program in July.) In August, the Region 1 Historic Preservation Team returned to the Bitterroot to direct the restoration of Lost Horse Cabin, a National Register-listed building on the Darby Ranger District. The project consisted of complete re-roofing, sill log and purlin repairs, and floor repairs (to be completed in 2004). Later the same month, volunteers in the Passport In Time program assisted the Forest's heritage program manager and Sula District personnel in a ten-year maintenance of McCart Lookout. Listed on the National Register, McCart was fully restored in 1996 and has been among Region 1's most popular rentals.

In meeting our responsibilities under Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), heritage specialists participated in a number of public education and outreach activities. These included participation in more than a dozen educational events, both internal and with the general public.

Continually strengthening the government-to-government relationship with neighboring Tribes is a priority of the Bitterroot National Forest. Since Bitterroot NF lands were once part of the traditional Bitterroot Salish homeland, tribal members continue to exercise their treaty rights and regularly visit cultural sites on the Forest. The Forest heritage program personnel consult regularly with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. The Forest also consults with the Nez Perce Tribe of Idaho and the Joseph Band of the Confederate Tribes of the Colville Reservation regarding Nez Perce sites and cultural concerns, and with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Fort Hall.

