

Executive Summary

The FY 2008 M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) Report provides an evaluation of monitoring performed on the NFGT (National Forests and Grasslands in Texas), as required by the *Plan* (1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan). The report provides monitoring item descriptions, the variability that is allowed before additional action is required and the FY 08 Findings and Recommendations for Change. Based on these findings, a 2008 Action Plan was prepared. The Action Plan also includes a listing of actions from previous years that have not been completed to date. This process allows managers to adapt their plans to changing conditions, and helps focus monitoring and evaluation efforts for the coming year.

The following is a summary of monitoring findings and other noteworthy issues.

Issue A. Ecosystem Condition, Health and Sustainability

Sub-Issue 1. Biological Diversity

- The regeneration of longleaf and shortleaf pine species continued in FY 08. Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2008 found that 29.6 percent of the stands had adequate stocking of the desired species. First-year survival exams found that 54.9 percent of the stands had adequate survival. Seedling survival was adversely impacted in 2008 by inadequate rainfall during the spring and early summer.
- The FS Veg age-class distribution report for the end of 2008 shows a continuing trend towards an older forest. More emphasis needs to be placed upon regeneration harvesting to ensure a more even supply of sizes and ages of trees are provided for suitable habitat for all species. If regeneration shortfalls continue, declining forest vigor of older stands will likely lead to loss of habitat for the endangered RCW.
- In FY 08, the NFGT prescribed burned approximately 165,390 acres. The *Plan* set an annual objective of approximately 100,000 acres of prescribed burning per year.
- The majority of management indicators have indicated stable or increasing trends through the past five-to-ten years. The RCW (red-cockaded woodpecker) population is at 332 active clusters, a new milestone for the NFGT. In the past three years, increased emphasis has been directed at evaluating previous known management indicator plant sites, verifying location, documenting and evaluating status and identifying protection and management needs.

- Habitat for MIS (Management Indicator Species) is generally improving throughout the forests and grasslands. Increased prescribed fire efforts are revealing greater improvements in both the number of certain element occurrences and quality of each occurrence for fire-dependent plant species.
- Most Management Indicator Species' long-term trends appear to be stable or increasing, with the exception of the wood thrush and Navasota ladies'-tresses.
- Most resident T&E (Threatened and Endangered) and Sensitive Species populations are increasing, with the exception of Navasota ladies'-tresses. The RCW and bald eagle populations are at an all-time high, along with increased sightings of the Louisiana black bear.

Sub-Issue 2. Forest and Range Health

- Air quality monitoring on the NFGT indicated units did not exceed the NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standard) PM (Particulate Matter) 2.5 level.
- No SPB (southern pine beetle) infestations were detected on the NFT (National Forests in Texas) in FY 08. The NFT participated in the SPB survey and results from the survey predicted extremely low populations, as no SPB were captured.
- NNIPS surveys were conducted forest-wide. This survey focused on primary vectors for infestations such as utility right-of-ways, special use sites, recreation sites, and road right-of-ways.

Sub-Issue 3. Watershed Conditions

- No soil and water disturbances occurred that were identified by NFGT personnel as exceeding the soil loss tolerance levels set out in the *Plan*.
- As part of the NFGT's endeavors to protect soil and water resources in FY 08, the Caddo and LBJ NGs continued to implement an active Watershed Improvement Program.
- There were no identified adverse soil and water occurrences from activities on NFGT lands or to impaired stream segments identified in FY 08.

- In 2008, TFS (Texas Forest Service) conducted a BMP (Best Management Practices) compliance review on the Davy Crockett, Sabine and Sam Houston National Forests. The review concluded that all the units were 100% in compliance and received excellent ratings.

Issue B. Sustainable Multiple Forest and Range Benefits

Sub-Issue 1. Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- Law Enforcement Officials continued their patrols of OHV (off-highway vehicle) use areas and issued citations to users for violations of riding laws and for creating unacceptable resource damage.
- During FY 08, the NFGT continued the process to implement the TMR (Travel Management Rule) regulations (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295). The TMR was finalized and published on November 9, 2005 (70 FR 68264). The TMR requires that each unit of the NFGT (the Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Sabine, and Angelina NFs as well as the Caddo/LBJ National Grasslands) determine which roads, trails, and areas would be open for motorized vehicle use in a separate process and publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) designating those roads, trails and areas open for motorized vehicle use on each unit. Amendment # 9 was signed on January 4, 2008 which implemented the TMR. MVUM maps have been produced for each unit and distributed to Forest users.

Sub-Issue 2. Infrastructure

- All road construction in FY 08 was in compliance with contract specifications and the *Plan's* Standards and Guidelines.
- In FY 08, all maintenance Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 roads had condition surveys conducted and current or new data was entered into the INFRA data base.
- A total of 32.1 miles of road reconstruction was accomplished. All of these miles included wing ditches with appropriately designed J-hooks to mitigate potential erosion problems that were identified in previous M&E reports.
- Eighty-five miles of boundary line maintenance was accomplished out of an approximate NFGT 3,300 mile total. This is only 2.57 percent of the total amount of boundary lines, which is well below the required 10 percent.
- Ground was broken for the new NFGT Supervisor's Office at the old administrative site in Lufkin, Texas in November 2008. The 18,000 square-foot

facility will be constructed using the agency's new "green" standards. The building should be ready for occupancy by the summer of 2010.

Sub-Issue 3. Human Influences

- There is a constant rise in use of NFGT lands that are near large urban areas. This has also multiplied the creation of unauthorized trails and other resource damage to the forests.
- Law enforcement agents are still encountering an increased amount of controlled substance use activity on the NFGT.

Sub-Issue 4. Roadless Areas, Wilderness, Wild and Scenic Rivers

- A NVUM (National Visitor Use Monitoring) survey was performed in FY 08. Results of the survey should be available in early 2010.

Sub-Issue 5. Timber

- For the last ten years, an average of 17.0 percent of the *Plan* specified ASQ (Allowable Sale Quantity) has been sold. Since the probability of exceeding ASQ is unlikely, this is not a real issue for the NFGT.
- The NFGT needs to identify areas of concern and develop associated project plans to build up the timber harvesting program in order to meet *Plan* target levels and meet resource-related needs.
- Project plans, prescriptions, environmental assessments and decision documents that were developed in FY 08 were reviewed and found to be in compliance with the *Plan*.
- Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2008 found that 29.6 percent of the stands exceeded the lower level of the FW-204-1 standard for the planted species. Stands that were below minimum survival levels (for planted seedlings) were checked for stocking. Enough natural seedlings were established to increase the total stand stocking levels (planted and natural seedlings) above the *Plan* minimum level for most of the deficient.
- No timber was harvested on unsuitable lands solely for timber management purposes.

Sub-Issue 6. Forage

- Grassland range allotments are being managed in a satisfactory condition of “fair to good.” In FY 08, the Caddo and LBJ NGs continued to implement a fundamental change in grazing schemes that began in 1998. The focus changed from year-round grazing to a seasonal grazing system.

Sub-Issue 7. Other Products

Mineral operations inspections in FY 08 indicated most activities were in compliance with the permit conditions and operating plans. There were no spills reported in FY 08.

Sub-Issue 8. Heritage Resources

- In FY 08, there were no projects which implemented *Plan* Standards and Guidelines that adversely affected historic properties.

Issue C. Organizational Effectiveness

Sub-Issue 1. Economics

- The NFGT is no longer allocated funds based on a percent of its need (as identified in the *Plan* as funds needed to accomplish its goals and objectives.) In FY 08, the NFGT’s expenditures were \$20,046,525 as compared to the *Plan*’s projected average budget needs of \$26,657,400.

Sub-Issue 2. Evaluating New Information

- **2008 Planning Rule Challenged in Citizens for Better Forestry v. USDA.**
On April 10, 2008, Citizens for Better Forestry and thirteen environmental groups filed suit in the United States District Court for the Northern District of California alleging that the 2008 Planning Rule, FEIS, and ROD violate NEPA. The complaint alleges that the 2008 Planning Rule “significantly weakens” provisions of the 1982 and 2000 Planning Rule and that the Forest Service violated NEPA because the FEIS “entirely fails to analyze or disclose the potential direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of the 2008 Rule.” Among the effects of the 2008 Planning Rule alleged by CBF not to have been adequately analyzed are: “the effects on terrestrial and aquatic species, including the continued viability of species that rely and depend on national forest system lands; effects related to soils; effects related to wildfire; effects related to late seral or old growth forests; effects related to watersheds, water quality, and supplies of drinking water; effects related to roadless characteristics; and effects related to climate change (global warming) including carbon sequestration.” CBF seeks an injunction that would set aside the 2008 Rule, prohibit its implementation, and enjoin any projects that

rely on it or tier to it. The 2008 Planning Rule was adopted on April 9, 2008 – one day before CBF filed its complaint.

- In January 2008, the NFGT signed Forest Plan Amendment #9 which implements the Travel Management Rule (70 FR 68264; November 9, 2005).
- In August 2008 the Non-Native Invasive Plant Species Environmental Assessment was signed allowing the NFGT to begin treating NNIPS.
- On September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike made landfall on the southeast coast of Texas. The storm center tracked northward through the Sam Houston and Davey Crockett NFs where trees, recreation areas and roads sustained substantial damage. The Angelina and Sabine NFs received only minor damage. Initial surveys by the NFGT identified approximately 7,600 acres of moderate to heavy damage. Based on these initial surveys, the NFGT developed an action plan to prioritize the recovery work to be done.
- To deal with a wildland urban interface issue, the NFGT conducted numerous prescribed fire and mechanical fuel treatment activities to reduce the potential for damaging wildfires occurring and spreading to intermingled private lands.
- In FY 08 the NFGT made a total of \$4,092,888 in payments to counties that contain NFGT lands.