

Chapter III. Evaluation of Outcomes on the Land

The NFGT analyzed the information found in Chapter II and the results are shown below.

Issue A. Ecosystem Condition, Health and Sustainability

Sub-Issue 1. Biological Diversity

- 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. The Angelina County weather station recorded average rainfall in 2008; however, lack of adequate precipitation during the early growing season months (March through May) is a significant cause of seedling mortality. In March 2.95 inches of rain fell, in April 3.06 inches fell, and in May only 2.28 inches fell. Since the NFGT is at the extreme western edge of the natural range for pine species, it makes seedling establishment difficult.
- The FSVeg age-class distribution report for the end of 2008 shows a continuing trend towards an older forest. For instance, the acres in stands over 100 years old have increased from 15,037 acres in 1992 to 68,251 acres in 2008, which is a 354 percent increase. Likewise, the acres in young stands age 0 (currently being regenerated) to 10 years old are just 8 percent of what they were in 1992: 83,612 acres in 1992 to just 6,910 acres in 2008. 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 average acres burned over the nine years is about 91,360 acres.

The majority of management indicators have indicated stable or increasing trends through the past five-to-ten years. The RCW 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. In addition, surveys in potential habitat have found a number of new locations for R8 TES and MIS. All new and relocated occurrences have been inventoried using GPS and added to the corporate database.

- 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 like the Louisiana squarehead. Through an evaluation of GIS data and FSveg, it is evident that communities such as the longleaf pine, shortleaf pine and tallgrass prairie are being restored and increasing. Most species' habitat and trends appear to be stable or increasing.

Most MIS' long-term trends appear to be stable or increasing, with the exception of the wood thrush and Navasota ladies'-tresses.

- Most resident T&E and Sensitive Species populations are increasing, with the exception of the Navasota ladies'-tresses (a plant which is difficult to monitor due to flowering cycles that are cyclic and unpredictable). The RCW and bald eagle populations are at an all-time high, with increased sightings of Louisiana black bear. Habitats for other sensitive species/management indicators appear to be stable.

Sub-Issue 2. Forest and Range Health

Only one fine particulate matter monitoring site is located within 40 kilometers of any of the National Forests or Grasslands in Texas. The Harris County PM2.5 monitor (EPA Site ID #482010024) is located 40 kilometers south of Sam Houston National Forest. Fine particulate matter levels near the Sam Houston National Forest are below both the 24-hour and national air quality standards. Therefore, prescribed burning activities has not caused or contributed to any exceedances of the PM_{2.5} NAAQS at this location.

- No SPB infestations were detected on the NFT in FY 08. The NFT participated in the spring southern pine beetle survey, and results from the survey predicted extremely low populations, as no SPB were captured. The number of the SPB insects, clerids and predators collected fell from the previous year. The NFT also participated in fall SPB trapping, a new program designed to provide early warning of SPB outbreaks. No SPB were collected in the fall. No detection fights were made due to the low level of SPB activity predicted.
- In FY 08, 38 acres of *Hydrilla verticillata* were treated as part of an ongoing NNIPS control and eradication effort in Ratcliff Lake on the Davy Crockett NF. On the LBJ NG, 57 acres were treated for the noxious weed, *Carduus nutans*, nodding thistle, and 60 acres were treated for an infestation of *Onopordum ananthium*, Scotch thistle. Giant Salvinia and Water Hyacinth were treated at Cagle, Stubblefield and Scotts Ridge Lakes on the Sam Houston National Forest. In addition, NNIPS surveys were conducted forest-wide. This survey focused on primary vectors for infestations such as utility rights-of-ways, special use sites, recreation sites, and road right-of-ways. Approximately 6,600 GPS (Global Positioning System) points were recorded as individual NNIPS infestations across the NFGT in acreages ranging from 0.001 acre (single tree) to 20 acres. An area

encompassing more than 25,000 acres was visually surveyed. The NFGT NNIPS Environmental Assessment Decision Notice was signed August 2008.

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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. Actions included the completion of 22 acres of watershed improvement.
- There were no identified adverse soil and water occurrences from activities on NFGT lands or to impaired stream segments identified in FY 08. Thirty sites were monitored for base line data by sampling PH, conductivity and turbidity.
- In February 2008, TFS conducted a BMP compliance review on the Davy Crockett, Sabine and Sam Houston National Forests. As part of their review, TFS monitors temporary roads for stabilization. The review concluded that overall compliance met the 100 percent variability target and passed in accordance to State Recommended BMPs. Also reports from Harvest Inspectors, Timber Sale Administrators and Mineral Operation Inspectors indicate there were no known problems.

Issue B. Sustainable Multiple Forest and Range Benefits

Sub-Issue 1. Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- Due to current and anticipated future budget reductions, in FY 08 the NFGT reorganized and the decision was made to eliminate the Landscape Architect position. The duties associated with the position were assigned to district staff members. Visual Quality will continue to be a part of other annual reviews conducted in program areas such as prescribed fire, timber sales, mineral operations, special uses, etc.
- In FY 08 trails data was loaded into the Infrastructure Application (INFRA) database, and trail condition surveys along with the trail bridge survey met protocols. The updating of this data base is an annual and ongoing process. The Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) Fee Legislation (that replaced the Fee Demonstration Program) has been implemented.
- Law enforcement officials continued their patrols of OHV use areas and issued citations to users for violations of riding laws and for creating unacceptable resource damage. In some areas where OHV use has not been deterred by issuing

citations, LEOs have arrested the violators and towed away their OHVs to gain compliance.

- During FY 08, the NFGT started the process to implement the Travel Management Rule (TMR) regulations (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295). The TMR was finalized and published on November 9, 2005 (70 FR 68264). This regulation recognizes OHVs as a legitimate use of the National Forest System lands, but requires that OHV use be carefully managed. The TMR restricts the use of motorized vehicles to designated roads, trails and areas. The Rule requires the designations be made at the local level, with public involvement, in order to continue to provide the citizens of the country with the use and enjoyment of these public lands, while protecting the important environmental resources, services, values and uses of these public lands.

The TMR requires that each unit of the NFGT (the Sam Houston, the Davy Crockett, the Sabine, and the Angelina National Forests and 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. A *Plan* Amendment will be needed to fully implement the TMR on the NFGT. The NFGT has a target date of September 30, 2007 to be ready to publish the MVUM maps for each unit.

Sub-Issue 2. Infrastructure

- All road construction in FY 08 was in compliance with contract specifications and *Plan* 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. Road data is maintained with respect to the Regional and WO INFRA protocols. The NFGT is currently at 100 percent of required data input. Annual maintenance including cleaning ditches, mowing, cleaning and repair of culverts, and rock replacement are performed to the standards found in the annual planning process. However, the maintenance backlog assessments (that were done concurrently with the inventories) have identified a need of \$8,963,223 for annual maintenance and \$45,014,582 for deferred maintenance.
- 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.
- Approximately twenty percent of the NFGT facilities were inspected and the data was entered into the INFRA data base.

- 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.
- Eighty-five miles of boundary line maintenance was accomplished. This is only 2.57 percent of the total amount of boundary lines, which is well below the required 10 percent. If these lines are not maintained, additional survey costs are incurred to re-establish them. Also, trespass cases are usually more prevalent as boundary lines deteriorate and these disputes require additional time and funding to resolve.

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.
- Inspections of land use authorizations in FY 08 indicated that most activities were in compliance with the terms of authorization

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

- Since a NVUM (National Visitor Use Monitoring) survey is not scheduled to be performed again until FY 08, no new data from a survey was available in FY 06. However, a random sampling of Wildergram cards during the year still indicates low use of wilderness areas.

Sub-Issue 5. Timber

- For the last ten years, an average of 17.6 percent of the *Plan* specified ASQ 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. This will help the NFGT in moving toward meeting its *Plan* management objectives for habitat improvement, forest health, age-class distribution and restoration 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*. On-site inspections of silvicultural practices, including site preparation and tree planting, found no violations of *Plan* standards.

- 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 stands. The remaining deficient stands will be monitored to see if sufficient suitable natural seedlings become established to adequately stock the stands. Only in cases where stands are grossly deficient in suitable stocking will additional site preparation and planting be considered.
- No timber was harvested on unsuitable lands solely for timber management purposes.

Sub-Issue 6. Forage

- Grassland allotments are being managed to a satisfactory condition of fair to good. In FY 08, the grassland units 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. This implemented a high intensity/low duration grazing system which resulted in a higher number of cattle grazing for a shorter grazing period. The change resulted in fewer total AUMs (Animal Unit Months - this is equal to a cow and a calf grazing for one month); however, it still provided for the desired grazing results.

Sub-Issue 7. Other Products

- Minerals activities on the NFGT have effects at the national and local levels. These effects include adding additional jobs, increasing revenues to local shops and businesses, providing royalties to local residents, impacting local roads, increasing or decreasing payments in lieu of taxes to local counties. Inspections in FY 08 indicated most activities were in compliance with operating plans. There were no spills reported during 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. Organization Effectiveness

Sub-Issue 1. Economics

- Since 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), tracking actual expenditures and comparing them to the average projected budget shown in the *Plan* is the only way the NFGT has to determine how much less than *Plan* projected dollars are received. In FY 08, NFGT expenditures were \$20,046,525 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 09, the NFGT will continue its prescribed fire program and increase efforts to mechanically treat strips of land along federal property boundaries to help mitigate the potential for the spread of wildfire.

- In FY 08, the NFGT made a total of \$4,092,888 in payments to counties that contain NFGT lands.