Caribou-Targhee NF

Caribou-Targhee NF
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Record of Decision

Final Environmental Impact Statement

Revised Forest Plan

Caribou National Forest

Located In:
Bannock, Bear Lake, Bonneville, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida, and Power Counties in the State of Idaho
Box Elder and Cache Counties in the State of Utah
Lincoln County in the State of Wyoming

Responsible Agency:
USDA - Forest Service, Caribou – Targhee National Forest

Responsible Official:
Jack G. Troyer, Intermountain Regional Forester

Recommending Official:
Jerry B. Reese, Caribou - Targhee NF Forest Supervisor

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Preface

In Government jargon, what you are reading is called a Record of Decision or a "ROD." It describes my decision to approve the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for the Caribou National Forest (Revised Plan) and why I made this choice. I felt a good way to describe my decision in this "ROD" would be an informal message to the people I work for – each and every American across this land. These are your National Forests and I thank you for your interest in them.

Specifically, this ROD has two purposes: First, it is a legal document detailing a formal decision from a government agency. Second, and equally important, it explains the "why" of that decision. It is my sincere desire that I speak clearly through this document. In those places where legal requirements make for difficult reading, I apologize.

My decision strikes a balance between competing demands expressed by many people. It addresses Americans' needs and desires for this National Forest. Although this decision is mine, it has not been made alone. More than 3,200 letters, postcards, emails and phone calls were received during the development of the Revised Plan. These comments helped guide Caribou-Targhee National Forest (NF) staff members as they developed the Revised Plan. This ROD and the supporting documents will shape the management of the Caribou NF for the next 10 to 15 years.

This revision process has been arduous, lengthy, and at times contentious. I want to sincerely thank all the people who participated in the process, especially those who became involved in the numerous collaborative efforts seeking solutions.

I want to make it clear that the Forest Service understands its special role in managing the National Forests. Through their representatives in Congress, Americans have told the Forest Service that the 191 million acres of their National Forests and Grasslands are to be managed with a multiple-use philosophy.

In recent years, many communities that are home to the National Forests have been undergoing a transformation. Economic conditions have required lumber mills, farms and ranches to become larger and more efficient. As this has occurred, more and more people have left rural communities. Yet, much of the local social fabric is rooted in small local operations with close ties to the National Forests. Many urban dwellers also look to the National Forests as places where they can reconnect with the natural environment.

The previous Forest Plan for the Caribou NF reflected the desires that the public had nearly 18 years ago, when the primary focus was on what the land could produce. These desires have changed, and they will continue to change. Today's focus is centered more on the condition of the land as a basis for providing multiple goods and services.

Much history remains to be written about the National Forests. These lands can help maintain a quality of life, both for the people who live and work on these lands, and for those interested in spending time visiting these American treasures. People come to the National Forests not only to seek solitude, but also to teach their children how to hike, camp, hunt and fish – to appreciate nature. The potential for outdoor recreation to help sustain local economies is great, as is the potential to continue

the tradition of providing our children and future generations with special places to develop an appreciation of the natural resources of our country.

Recognizing that conditions on the National Forests do not remain static, that public desires change, and that new information is constantly being developed, the Revised Plan embraces an adaptive management approach. This means that as conditions change, so will the management plan. That is why there will be Forest Plan amendments that will, if you wish, involve you. Through both scientific research and talking to the people who use the Forests, I intend to keep the Revised Plan current in respect to the needs of people as well as nature's processes.

As I emphasized earlier, the National Forests are managed under a multiple-use concept. It is the job of the Forest Service to find a place on the National Forests for uses such as timber harvest, livestock grazing, outdoor recreation and mineral development, as well as habitat for wildlife and lands for healthy, diverse vegetation. That is not to say that each use can or should occur on every acre. The goal must be to blend the different uses in a way that is sustainable and best meets the needs of the American people.

"Sustainable" means satisfying present needs without compromising the needs of future generations. To achieve the goal of sustainability, the Revised Plan establishes goals and objectives that will provide for more diverse conditions than currently exist on the Forest. In some areas, processes such as fire, that are important in maintaining the overall health of the lands, will be reintroduced. In other areas, intensive restoration and resource development will occur to provide for public use and the area's economic health.

As a final nod toward legality I need to add that throughout the development of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) and the Revised Plan, I have asked for a Plan that is scientifically credible, sustainable, and legally sufficient but not burdened with excessive process requirements that do not contribute to good decisions. I believe the Revised Plan meets those criteria.

Thank you again for your interest in management of the Caribou National Forest.

JACK G. TROYER
Regional Forester
Intermountain Region, USDA – Forest Service

Part 1 Introduction

Forest Setting

The Caribou National Forest (Caribou NF) lies in the northern reaches of the Great Basin Region. In general, precipitation is low and climatic conditions harsh. High, rugged mountain ranges rise sharply from semi-arid sagebrush plains and agricultural valleys. Forests occupy approximately 50 percent of the Caribou NF, mainly above 6,000 feet in elevation and support stands of Douglas-fir, subalpine fir, lodgepole pine, Engelmann spruce, and aspen. Shrubs such as sagebrush and rabbitbrush dominate non-forested areas. The Caribou NF provides a wide variety of diverse habitats for 334 species of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife known or suspected to occur on the Forest. Six of these species are listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The water bodies on the Caribou NF provide habitat for a variety of aquatic, plant, insect, and fish species, including the Bonneville and Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

The Caribou NF contains lands in ten counties in three states and includes 986,987 acres. Bannock County, a retail and commercial hub for southeastern Idaho, is at the center of this "zone of influence." Residents of several urban centers use the Caribou NF for recreation and commercial uses.

My Decision

I have selected Alternative 7R described in the ***Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest*** for implementation as the Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest. By selecting Alternative 7R, I am approving the Revised Forest Plan that describes in detail the goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, management area direction, suitable uses, and monitoring requirements for the Caribou National Forest.

The overarching goal of Alternative 7R is to restore native ecosystems to a healthy resilient state using a combination of active management activities and natural processes. Because of the extent of restoration needed and practical limitations to active management, activities are targeted to those areas and ecological types in greatest need for restoration or to provide for public safety and protection of private property in the wildland/urban interface. Wildland fire use is permitted in other areas to take advantage of natural processes to accomplish Plan objectives. Restoration of ecological systems is a key component of maintaining the viability of native and desired non-native species within the planning area and overall health of Forest ecosystems.

Management changes in the Revised Forest Plan are designed to provide a continuing range of recreation experiences and resolve resource and user conflicts. The Revised Forest Plan establishes new standards and guidelines for riparian and aquatic areas, which provide for the protection of these important resources and dependent species, while allowing continued livestock grazing important to local communities. Mineral extraction, primarily phosphate mining, will continue under existing

leases and an improved framework for reclamation and abatement of hazardous materials such as selenium.

The Revised Forest Plan features an emphasis on adaptive management and monitoring to address uncertainties regarding management of Forest resources, changing conditions and scientific knowledge. Adaptive management will identify the need to change direction in the Revised Forest Plan as our understanding of ecological and social systems and their interaction evolve.

Decision Authority

I have been delegated the authority to make this decision by the Secretary of Agriculture and Chief of the Forest Service (36 CFR 219.10 (c)).

Why Alternative 7R?

The most important consideration in my decision to select Alternative 7R for implementation as the Revised Caribou Forest Plan was ensuring the long-term health of the land while providing for the needs of society and for the enjoyment and benefit of future generations. I know that selecting Alternative 7R is not going to completely satisfy every group or individual. However, I have concluded that Alternative 7R is a reasoned choice that strikes a balance between a relatively high level of ecological health and a high level of commodity production while providing new opportunities for economic growth and greater diversification of local economies. It provides for healthy diverse vegetation sufficient to maintain viable populations of desired native and non-native species dependent upon habitat provided by the Caribou National Forest. In my judgment, Alternative 7R is consistent with all laws, regulations and policy governing National Forest planning.

Alternative 7R was built around the public's diverse wishes, the wants and needs of our American Indian neighbors, and other government agency objectives. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe and their ancestral homelands are located within and surrounding the planning area. Throughout the planning process, the Forest has consulted with the Tribe. Based on information received during Tribal consultation, the Forest adjusted access adjacent to the Fort Hall Reservation and recognized Tribal Trust obligations up front. In addition, the Revised Forest Plan includes objectives for continued consultation with the Tribe during implementation of the Plan.

Alternative 7R addresses the contentious issue of access and travel management. Public comment on this subject is highly variable, ranging from a desire to allow more motorized access and developed recreation experiences to a desire for complete abolition of motorized uses on the Caribou National Forest. The range of Alternatives analyzed in the FEIS reflects this continuum of public desires. Almost universally, the public has been in favor of limiting motorized access to designated routes in the summer. In Alternative 7R, this has been done on 97 percent of the Forest; on the remaining 3 percent cross-country motorized access will be allowed during the snow-free season. The Revised Forest Plan establishes access standards that range from allowing summer cross-country motorized travel near Soda Springs, Idaho to restricting winter cross-country non-motorized travel in critical elk and deer winter range. These prescriptions provide a mix of motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities across the Forest. Route density standards generally match existing opportunities. In a few areas some routes (approximately 40 miles) will be closed to meet density standards.

Preserving areas inventoried as roadless is very important to many who commented during the development of the Revised Plan. In Alternative 7R approximately 6 percent of the Forest's Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) will be managed very restrictively, either as Recommended Wilderness or Research Natural Areas. On 45 percent of the IRA acreage, management will be generally restrictive, but will allow vegetation manipulation where needed for hazardous fuels reduction or restoration of desired vegetation conditions. Another 41 percent of the IRA acres are generally non-forested and will be managed under Big Game Winter Range or Rangeland Vegetation management prescriptions.

Part 2 Public Involvement and Alternatives Considered

Government and Public Involvement

Tribal Trust Responsibilities

The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe has ancestral Treaty Rights on all public domain lands reserved for National Forest purposes administered by the Caribou-Targhee National Forest. The relationship of the United States government with American Indian Tribes is based on legal agreements between sovereign Nations. The Fort Bridger Treaty of July 3, 1868 provided for the establishment of the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. It also granted hunting and fishing rights to Tribal members on "...all unoccupied lands of the United States." These rights are still in effect and the Revised Plan recognizes these rights. Consultation with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council is required on land management activities that could affect these rights. The Caribou-Targhee Forest Supervisor has consulted with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council numerous times regarding development of the Revised Plan (FEIS, Appendix A, Public Involvement).

How was the public involved in developing this Plan?

In April 1999, a report called ***Initial Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) for the Caribou National Forest*** was released for public review. This report included information on current resource conditions and uses of the Forest, a description of a range of Desired Future Conditions, and a synopsis of what management direction in the ***Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland Land and Resource Management Plan*** (1985) (1985 Plan) needed to change to meet the range of Desired Future Conditions. Public comment was invited on the preliminary findings contained in the AMS. Fifty-seven letters with a total of 463 individual comments were received.

On August 9, 1999 a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was published in the ***Federal Register*** *(pages 43142 to 43144)*. This initiated the scoping process. On August 16, 1999, a scoping letter was mailed to interested and potentially affected publics. The comment period was to close on October 2, 1999, but was extended to October 17, 1999.

During November 1999 the Forest hosted a series of open houses to share a drafts of the "No Action" and "Proposed Action" Alternatives with the public. In addition to the identification of preliminary issues, the Forest solicited ideas for possible other alternatives. (See planning record).

In October 2000 another series of open houses was held to review preliminary draft alternatives and planning issues.

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and Draft Revised Forest Plan (Draft Revised Plan) were released to the public on April 27, 2001. The initial comment period was scheduled to close on

August 31, 2001 but was extended to November 1, 2001. Several open houses and briefings were conducted to introduce the DEIS and Draft Revised Plan to interested parties. The Forest received approximately 3,200 letters, postcards, e-mails, and phone calls from people commenting on the draft documents. The Forest ID Team developed Alternative 7R based on those comments. (See FEIS, Appendix A, Public Involvement for more detailed information.)

Planning Issues

ISSUE 1—RECREATION, ACCESS AND SCENERY MANAGEMENT

Recreation policies, user preferences, and measurements of quality have changed since the 1985 Forest Plan and need to be incorporated into the Revised Plan. Increased recreation demand and use of the Forest combined with a wide range of recreation preferences, has led to some contention between recreationists (e.g., snowmobilers and cross-country skiers). This public contention, coupled with agency responsibilities and directives, has led to increased discussion and debate over how Caribou NF lands should be designated for recreation in the Revised Plan.

ISSUE 2—SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The Forest Service uses an ecosystem management approach to land management to achieve its mandate of sustainable multiple use. This approach blends the needs of people and their environmental values with physical and biological elements to maintain diverse, productive, resilient, and sustainable ecosystems. Because humans are a part of the ecosystem, their well being is shaped by it, and in turn, people shape ecological processes and the health of the ecosystem.

The Zone of Influence for this plan analysis includes nine[1] counties with people that have strong historical, emotional, and economic ties to the Forest. Public concerns that pertain to this issue are founded in the debate of how to best meet the economic/social needs of society, while considering environmental values and responsibly caring for the land. Decisions made in the Forest planning process may result in changes to the economic condition of local communities and may influence regional and national markets.

ISSUE 3—ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

One of the main distinctions of ecosystem management from past management approaches is the emphasis on restoring, retaining and maintaining the functions and processes that keep the natural environment resilient to natural disturbances (e.g., fire, wind-throw, and insect/disease infestation) and human-caused disturbances (e.g., prescribed fire, thinning, timber harvest, and grazing). Ecosystem management also focuses on the condition of the Forest versus the goods and services produced from the Forest.

Public concern stem from the debate over how to maintain the health and productivity of the ecosystem with respect to natural processes and vegetation structure and composition. This is a difficult issue when combined with the requirement that the Forest Service achieve the mandate of multiple uses, attempting to balance human needs and values with the ecological aspects of the ecosystem. Historically, this has often involved suppression of natural wildfire in an effort to preserve the scenic, recreation, and economic values of the Forest. More recently, forest managers and the public have

[1] The National Forest System (NFS) lands administered by the Caribou are located within ten counties, and twelve counties lie very close to the Forest. For this analysis, however, the Zone of Influence encompasses nine counties. (See FEIS Chapter 3, Issue 2, Socioeconomics.)

recognized the need for restoring natural processes such as fire and insects and disease to the ecosystem. Deciding on the mix and magnitude of natural and human-induced disturbances is a key element in the Revised Plan.

ISSUE 4—LIVESTOCK GRAZING

Grazing on public lands is an issue that has increased in complexity as the lifestyles, and subsequently the interests of society have evolved. There has been an increase in concern for the health and productivity of forest and rangeland habitats, and some may consider these concerns to be more important than historic commodity driven goals such as grazing. However, grazing as a permitted use plays a traditional and vital economic role in local agriculture. Many livestock grazing operations rely on the forage produced on public lands to meet a portion of their yearly grazing needs. Management direction in the Revised Plan may affect rangeland resources and the level of livestock grazing authorized.

ISSUE 5--MINERALS OPERATIONS, RECLAMATION, AND HAZARDOUS SUBSTANCES

Phosphate is by far the largest mineral resource currently being mined on the Forest. There are five Known Phosphate Leasing Areas that lie, at least partially, within the Forest boundaries. The potential also exists for productive oil/gas wells and mining of locatable (i.e., perlite, pumice, gold) minerals in localized areas. Development of these resources is not expected to be extensive.

Issues concerning mining have changed since the 1985 Plan was originally composed. Some of these changes are: a public desire for, and emphasis on, more natural appearing reclaimed landscapes; the discovery that selenium and possibly other hazardous substances are leaching from phosphate mines; and changes in the regulations concerning leasing of National Forest System lands for oil and gas development.

ISSUE 6--RIPARIAN/WETLAND AREAS AND AQUATIC BIOTA

Riparian areas include banks and adjacent areas of water bodies that have considerably moister soils than contiguous floodplains and uplands. Wetlands have more available water for longer periods of time than riparian areas, making them only slightly different. Both of these areas are vital because they provide specialized wildlife habitat and their localized vegetation notably contributes to stream bank and floodplain stability as well as water temperature and quality. They are also highly valued by recreationists. Improved management direction in the Revised Plan is needed to maintain or restore riparian vegetation, channel stability and function, and other aquatic resources.

ISSUE 7--TIMBER SALE PROGRAM

The Forest Service is required to program timber harvest on a non-declining yield basis, which means the timber harvested should not exceed the quantity which the Forest is capable of producing on a sustained-yield basis. Three local mills currently purchase commercial wood products from the Caribou National Forest (Stoddard Lumber Co., St. Anthony, ID, Yellowstone Log Homes, Rigby, ID, and Jensen Lumber Co., Ovid, ID). Two other commercial buyers have been active recently in purchasing timber from the Forest (Mountain Valley Timber Co. and Louisiana Pacific Corporation). Demand for commercial wood products, including sawtimber, is about 11 million board feet per year. The Revised Forest Plan will reassess timber suitability, as required by National Forest Management Act (NFMA), and develop additional direction for managing suitable timberlands.

ISSUE 8--ROADLESS AREA MANAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

The Forest Service is required to analyze and recommend areas for Wilderness designation when doing a Plan revision, but only Congress can designate areas for inclusion into the National Wilderness Preservation System. Although Idaho has approximately 4,006,000 acres of designated Wilderness, none of those areas lie within the Caribou NF. The 1985 Plan recommended a 14,600-acre section of the Mt. Naomi Inventoried Roadless Area and a 16,000-acre section of the Worm Creek Inventoried Roadless Area to Congress for Wilderness designation. To date, Congress has not acted on these recommendations. Public concern regarding Wilderness recommendations and management of IRAs is directly related to concerns for Forest access and must be addressed in the Revised Plan.

ISSUE 9--WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

A variety of diverse habitats exist for approximately 334 species of terrestrial vertebrate wildlife known or suspected to occur on the Forest. These habitats provide cover, forage, water, and reproductive sites for these species. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires National Forests to provide habitat in order "...to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area" (36 CFR 219.12). Public concerns regarding this issue relate to the potential effects on wildlife habitat altered by management actions implementing the Revised Plan.

Alternative Development

Alternatives under consideration in the DEIS were developed from the following sources:

- Monitoring and evaluation of current Forest resources and implementation of the 1985 Plan
- Review of Forest Service policy and direction
- An assessment of existing conditions, disclosed in the ***Initial Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) for the Caribou National Forest*** (April 1999) and subsequent public comments
- Issues identified during the public scoping process and comments received at public meetings held in December 1999 and November 2000
- Management concerns and opportunities identified by the interdisciplinary team

Planning issues were used to develop a range of alternatives to the proposed action as described in the Notice of Intent (August 9, 1999). Fourteen preliminary alternatives were initially identified, including the No Action and the Proposed Action. Seven of these preliminary alternatives were eliminated from further analysis. The remaining seven were and their effects were displayed in the DEIS. In response to public comments on the DEIS, the Forest developed another alternative, Alternative 7R. Thus, fifteen alternatives were considered during the planning process.

Alternatives Not Considered in Detail

The public suggested management options during scoping or during public participation activities. The following options or alternatives were considered by the interdisciplinary team but were eliminated from detailed analysis. (See FEIS, Chapter 2, Alternatives Considered but Eliminated from Detailed Study.)

- Make the forest a fish, wildlife, and plant sanctuary, preserve or wilderness.
- Open the forest to all uses, everywhere, at all times. No travel restrictions, including no restrictions on motorized use.
- Eliminate off-road and snowmobile use. Allow only foot and horse traffic.
- Acquire all in-holdings.
- Allow no livestock grazing forest-wide.
- Allow no timber harvest forest-wide.
- Harvest only old or diseased trees forest-wide.

Alternatives Considered in Detail

ALTERNATIVE 1—NO ACTION (CURRENT PLAN DIRECTION)

Alternative 1 proposes to continue management under the 1985 Plan for the Caribou NF as amended. This Alternative reflects the likely outcomes of managing Forest resources under the direction in the current plan. Management prescription language in the 1985 Plan was updated to more accurately describe current management direction. In addition, prescriptions have been reclassified into broader Management Area Categories to simplify on-the-ground implementation, to improve consistency and understanding across and between National Forests, and to facilitate broad-scale analysis of issues.

ALTERNATIVE 2—PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative 2 proposes to strengthen direction in the 1985 Plan to address the "needs for change" described in the AMS (April, 1999). This Alternative reflects the likely outcomes of managing Forest resources to attain the range of "desired future condition" statements outlined in the AMS. The AMS identified a need for change for each of the planning issues.

ALTERNATIVE 3

Alternative 3 proposes to manage Forest resources to produce more goods and services to meet the needs of people. This Alternative reflects the likely outcomes of managing the Forest for relatively high levels of a variety of uses and water yield while maintaining site productivity and environmental quality to meet State and Federal regulations. It emphasizes commodity production, livestock grazing, motorized access, the timber sale program, and mining.

ALTERNATIVE 4

Alternative 4 proposes to manage Forest vegetation using a mix of restoration strategies, including timber harvest, thinning, and fire, to achieve ecological objectives. It focuses on an accelerated program of vegetation management to restore or maintain ecosystem processes that function properly in the long term. Restoration efforts will be emphasized on landscapes where vegetation is at higher risk to catastrophic disturbance, or where watershed condition or function is impaired. Although this Alternative is similar to Alternative 2, it proposes a more aggressive approach to vegetation management, road rehabilitation and obliteration, and prescribed burning. It emphasizes ecological restoration, minerals management, riparian/wetland areas, aquatic habitat, water quality, non-motorized access, and wildlife.

ALTERNATIVE 5

Alternative 5 proposes to manage Forest resources to increase recreation opportunities, scenic beauty, and healthy landscapes. It reflects the likely outcomes of managing ecosystems consistent with recreation objectives. This Alternative emphasizes economics, based on amenity values, riparian/wetland areas, aquatic habitat, water quality, motorized and non-motorized access, and wildlife.

ALTERNATIVE 6

Alternative 6 was developed from a proposal submitted by the Greater Yellowstone Coalition and other environmental organizations. This Alternative emphasizes ecological protection, enhancement, and restoration on the Forest. A significant portion of the Forest's IRAs would be recommended to Congress for Wilderness designation. Timber harvest and grazing would be managed and permitted when it is demonstrated that those activities would not damage other ecological functions.

ALTERNATIVE 7—PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE IN DRAFT EIS

Alternative 7 proposes to manage Forest vegetation to move towards the historic range of variability (HRV)[2]. This Alternative would manage resources using a mix of restoration strategies, including timber harvest, thinning, fire, and grazing management. It proposes vegetation management, road rehabilitation, prescribed fire, and wildfire. It emphasizes the issues of ecosystem management, riparian/wetland areas, minerals management, aquatic habitat, water quality, wildlife, and motorized/non-motorized access.

ALTERNATIVE 7R—SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The overarching goal of Alternative 7R is to restore native ecosystems to a healthy resilient state using a combination of active management activities and natural processes. Because of the extent

[2] The historic range of variability (HRV) refers to the structure, composition, processes and patterns of a vegetative community occurring prior to the arrival and intervention of modern man.

of restoration needed and practical limitations to active management, activities are targeted to those areas and ecological types in greatest need for restoration or to provide for public safety and protection of private property in the wildland/urban interface. Wildland fire use is permitted in other areas to take advantage of natural processes to accomplish Plan objectives. Restoration of ecological systems is a key component of maintaining the viability of native and desired non-native species within the planning area.

Alternative 7R features an emphasis on adaptive management and monitoring to address uncertainties regarding management of Forest resources, changing conditions and scientific knowledge. Adaptive management will identify the need to change direction in the Revised Forest Plan as our understanding of ecological and social systems and their interaction evolve.

Part 3 Decision and Rationale

Introduction

The analysis of Alternatives and public comment received on the DEIS and Draft Revised Plan documented in the ***Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Revised Forest Plan for the Caribou National Forest*** serves as the foundation for my decision for the Revised Land and Resource Management Plan for the Caribou NF. My decision incorporates by reference the analysis of effects and management direction disclosed in the FEIS and Revised Forest Plan and the planning record in its entirety.

Forest Plan Decisions

A Forest Plan establishes the framework for future decision-making by outlining a broad, general program for achieving the goals and objectives of the Forest. A Forest Plan does not make a commitment to the selection of any specific project and does not dictate day-to-day administrative activities needed to carry on internal operations. The Revised Plan is implemented through the design, execution, and monitoring of site-specific activities. I am making the following decisions in the Revised Forest Plan:

- Goals and objectives that lead to ecological sustainability, contribute to economic and social sustainability, and provide for multiple uses.
- Forest-wide requirements (standards and guidelines) that apply to future management activities.
- Management direction through the use of management prescription area designation.
- Non-wilderness allocations or Wilderness recommendations for Inventoried Roadless Areas.
- Designation of suitable timber land and establishment of the allowable timber sale quantity for the planning period and identification of suitability and capability of lands for producing forage.
- Monitoring and evaluation requirements.

EVALUATION OF INVENTORIED ROADLESS AREAS (36 CFR 219.17) AND OTHER SPECIAL AREA DESIGNATIONS

I am recommending approximately 42,500 acres to Congress for Wilderness designation in the Mt. Naomi and Caribou City Inventoried Roadless Areas. These areas will be managed by the guidance in Management Prescription 1.3 (see Chapter 4 of the Revised Plan) with the goal of protecting and perpetuating their Wilderness character. Management of other IRAs is described in Chapter 4 of the Revised Plan. The effects of this decision are more fully described in the FEIS, Chapters 3 and 4, Issue 8, Roadless Area Management and Recommended Wilderness.

Other special designations made in the Revised Plan include managing all seven of the Research Natural Areas (RNA) under Management Prescription 2.2. These areas will be managed, in collaboration with the Rocky Mountain Research Station, to allow natural processes such as fire to occur. The Management Prescription is described in the Revised Plan (Chapter 4) and the RNAs are described in the FEIS (Chapters 3 and 4, Other Resources, Research Natural Areas.)

In 1998 the Forest conducted a Wild and Scenic River Eligibility Study as part of the revision effort. More than 230 streams were evaluated in three separate screens. The study identified two sites, St. Charles Creek and Elk Valley Marsh, as eligible for study under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. In all alternatives, both of these streams would be managed under Management Prescription 2.5—Wild and Scenic Eligible Recreational River. The purpose of this Management Prescription is to "...maintain and protect the essentially free-flowing character and the outstandingly remarkable values that qualify" the body of water, pending a suitability determination. (Revised Plan, Chapter 4, Prescription 2.5; FEIS, Chapters 3 and 4, Other Resources, Wild and Scenic Rivers)

The Revised Plan includes new Special Emphasis Areas (SEA) for Caribou Mountain and Lander Trail to retain historic features of the sites. Some of Caribou Mountain area would be recommended to be withdrawn from mineral entry.

FOREST-WIDE MULTIPLE-USE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES (36 CFR 219.11(b))

Goals are a concise statement that describes a desired condition to be achieved sometime in the future. It is normally expressed in broad, general terms and may not have a specific date for accomplishment.

An objective is a clear and quantifiable statement of planned results to be achieved within a stated time period. An objective must be achievable, measurable, and have a stated time period for completion.

The Revised Plan includes a set of Forest multiple-use goals and objectives that include a description of the Desired Future Condition of the Caribou NF and an identification of the quantities of goods and services that are expected to be produced or provided during the planning period. Goals and objectives are described in Chapter 3 of the Revised Plan.

FOREST-WIDE STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES (36 CFR 219.13 TO 219.27)

Standards are used to promote the achievement of the goals and objectives; and to assure compliance with laws, regulations, Executive Orders or policy. Standards are binding limitations on management activities that are within the authority of the Forest Service to enforce. A standard can also be expressed as a constraint on management activities or practices. The Revised Plan contains both Forest-wide and Management Prescription Area standards. These are displayed in Chapters 3 and 4 of the Revised Plan.

Guidelines are used in the same way as standards but tend to be operationally flexible to respond to variations, such as changing site conditions or changed management circumstances. Guidelines are a preferred or advisable course of action and they are expected to be carried out, unless site-specific analysis identifies a better approach. The Revised Plan contains both Forest-wide and Management Prescription Area guidelines in Chapters 3 and 4.

MANAGEMENT PRESCRIPTION AREA DIRECTION (36 CFR 219.11(C))

Management prescriptions, an integrated set of management practices, have been applied to specific areas of land to attain goals and objectives on the Caribou NF (See Table 1.) Management prescriptions in the Revised Plan identify the emphasis and focus of management activities in a specific area; however, ***emphasis,*** as used in this context, is defined as a focus or a highlight and does not necessarily mean exclusive use. The specific direction stated in a management prescription determines what uses are allowed and to what extent the uses are permitted. The Revised Plan establishes the following Management Prescription Areas on the Caribou NF (See Table 1). The direction for each of these management prescriptions is detailed in Chapter 4 of the Revised Plan.

Table 1: Management Prescription Areas in the Revised Plan

Prescription Category	Prescription Name (Number)	Acres
Wilderness /Backcountry	Recommended Wilderness (1.3)	42500
Special Management Area	Bloomington Lake SEA (2.1.1)	200
	Visual Quality Maintenance (2.1.2)	10100
	Pocatello Municipal Watershed (2.1.3)	5100
	Caribou Mountain SEA (2.1.4)	20400
	Lander Trail Corridor SEA (2.1.5)	2900
	Gravel Creek SEA (2.1.6)	157
	Research Natural Areas (2.2)	5700
	Wild and Scenic Eligible River (2.5)	2800
	Big Game Winter Range (critical) (2.7.1)	73900
	Big Game Winter Range (2.7.2)	109800
	Aquatic Influence Zone (2.8.3)	58200
Semi-primitive non-intensive	Non-motorized Recreation and Wildlife Security (3.1)	41200
	Semi-primitive Recreation (3.2)	181800
	Semi-primitive Restoration (3.3)	73800
Developed/Dispersed Recreation	Developed Recreation (4.1)	-
	Special Use Permit Recreation Sites (4.2)	1100
	Dispersed Camping Management (4.3)	3900
Forested Vegetation Management	Forest Vegetation Management (5.2)	163900
Rangeland Vegetation Management	Rangeland Vegetation Management (6.2)	234400
Concentrated Development Area	Utility Corridors, Commercial and Administrative Sites (8.1)	100
	Inactive Phosphate Leases (8.2.1)	2400
	Phosphate Mine Areas (8.2.2)	8000

SUITABILITY DETERMINATIONS (36 CFR 219.14, 219.16 AND 219.20)

As required by NFMA, the Revised Plan identifies land suited for timber production. Using the criteria in my Selected Alternative, approximately 84,000 acres of forested vegetation are suitable for timber production. The method used to determine suitable and unsuitable acres is described in the FEIS, Chapter 4 and Appendix B, Issue 7: Timber Program. The tentatively suitable timber base is displayed on Map 14, in the Revised Plan map package.

Lands suitable for livestock grazing were also identified in this analysis. My determination is described in the FEIS, Chapter 4 and Appendix B, Issue 4: Livestock Grazing. Lands suitable for sheep and cattle grazing are displayed on Map 15, Revised Plan map package.

MONITORING AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT (36 CFR 219.11(D))

Forest Plan monitoring involves both legally required monitoring activities and monitoring that is conducted based on the availability of funding and personnel. The evaluation of monitoring data and other information provides an analysis of how existing conditions compare to Desired Future Conditions identified in the Revised Plan, the effectiveness of management direction, and validation of planning assumptions. The Monitoring and Evaluation Report is the tool to keep the public informed on progress towards meeting the goals and objectives of the Revised Plan.

This Revised Plan uses adaptive management to ensure that the management of the Forest responds to changing conditions and new information. Adaptive management allows managers to respond to changing conditions without having to amend the Revised Plan. The monitoring program was designed to accommodate several budget levels. Monitoring items are prioritized into three levels. If the Revised Plan is fully funded, all three levels may be accomplished. If budgets fall short, the highest priority monitoring will be conducted and other priorities may not be fully accomplished. This monitoring plan is detailed in Chapter 5 of the Revised Plan.

Rationale for my decision

My decision to select Alternative 7R for implementation is based on three principal factors.

1. **Consistency with National Policy and direction.** Forest plan decisions must be consistent with the extensive body of law, regulation and policy established at the national level.

2. **The relationship of my decision to planning issues identified during the planning process.** Organizations, local governments, and the general public all submitted comments that required me to take a hard look at the planning issues and how they were addressed by each alternative. In a number of cases public and agency comments helped me identify a reasonable range of alternatives and necessary management direction.

3. **Compatibility with other agency and Indian Tribe goals** was another important factor that drove my decision making process. Comments received from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes, State agencies, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and elected officials were considered in making my selection.

How each of these factors was considered in my decision is detailed below:

Consistency with National Policy

In making my decision I evaluated each of the Alternatives considered for compliance with National policy and direction. In all cases, except for the No Action Alternative, all the Alternatives are consistent with National policy and direction.

FOREST AND RANGELAND RENEWABLE RESOURCES PLANNING ACT (RPA)

The 1982 NFMA regulations at [36 CFR 219.12(f)(6)] require at least one alternative be developed that responds to and incorporates the Resources Planning Act (RPA) Program's tentative resource objectives for each National Forest/Grassland as displayed in Regional Guides.

The Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000), in lieu of the RPA Program, was completed in accordance with Government Performance Results Act and language in the Interior and Related Agencies Appropriations Act.

While Forest plans should be consistent with the broad guidance provided in the Strategic Plan and should consider the information provided by the RPA Assessment along with other available and relevant science, neither the Strategic Plan nor the Assessment contain recommended outputs that must be incorporated in specific Forest plans.

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE RESULTS ACT (GPRA) - FOREST SERVICE STRATEGIC PLAN

The Government Performance Results Act requires Federal agencies to prepare periodic strategic and annual performance plans, focusing on outcomes and results. The first Strategic Plan issued by the Forest Service in 1997 replaced the Agency's former strategic plan created under the RPA. This plan was updated in 2000.

The goals and objectives in the Revised Plan are consistent with the Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000).

Ecosystem Health - The Revised Plan addresses ecosystem health in a variety of ways. First, there is an emphasis on treatments to move towards HRV and more sustainable conditions, particularly in key vegetation types such as aspen communities. Livestock grazing standards will be instituted to help maintain or improve the condition of riparian areas on the Forest. Wildland fire will be used to restore ecosystem processes and patterns. Management emphasis will be placed on maintaining linkage habitat for wildlife.

Multiple Benefits to People - The Revised Plan maintains and preserves the variety of recreation opportunities currently available on the Caribou NF. The current level of commodity outputs may be reduced slightly, but this is not expected to have significant negative effects on the local economies.

Scientific and Technical Assistance - The Revised Plan is based on adaptive management, using monitoring and evaluation to enhance our understanding of the resources. Monitoring and evaluation provide an avenue for incorporating new information and obtaining technical assistance on management problems.

Effective Public Service - The Revised Plan was developed in response to comments from the public regarding management of the Caribou NF. The Revised Plan provides for human uses of the environment as well as preserving much of the inherent "wildness" of some areas on the Forest. Goals and objectives throughout the Revised Plan emphasize cooperation and coordination with other interested parties in management of the natural resources on the Forest.

HEALTHY FORESTS INITIATIVE/NATIONAL FIRE PLAN

On December 11, 2002, the President announced a series of new administrative steps to reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfires and improve the health of our nation's forests. This is referred to as the Healthy Forest Initiative (HFI).

These actions will reduce unnecessary red tape and needless delays that have too often impeded efforts to reduce the threat of devastating wildfires and insect infestations that damage both public and private lands. The new procedures will ensure that needed environmental reviews and public review processes are conducted in the most efficient and effective way possible.

The National Fire Plan (NFP) is a long-term investment that will help protect communities and natural resources, and most importantly, the lives of firefighters and the public. The NFP is a key component of the Healthy Forests Initiative. It is a long-term commitment based on cooperation and communication among Federal agencies, States, local governments, Tribes and interested publics. Federal wildland fire management agencies worked closely with the partners to prepare a 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy, completed in August 2001.

The Revised Plan is consistent with the objectives of the HFI and the NFP by emphasizing hazardous fuel reduction in areas at risk of uncharacteristic wildland fires. The Revised Plan provides direction for restoration of historic vegetation characteristics. It calls for working with communities to reduce fire risk, particularly in the wildland urban interface. The Revised Plan places management emphasis on wildland/urban interface fuel reduction projects in four of the seven ecological subsections. The Revised Plan also emphasizes the use of wildland fire to manage vegetation in more remote areas such as the Caribou Range and Basin and Range Ecological Subsections. Priority will be given to proposing projects that move vegetation currently in Fire Condition Class 3 into Fire Condition Class 1 or 2.

NATIONAL ENERGY POLICY (E.O. 13212)

In May 2001, Executive Order 13212 was signed to expedite the processing of energy-related projects. The National Energy Plan was developed to implement this Executive Order. Based on this Plan, the Forest Service adopted an Energy Implementation Plan. The Forest has had little to no expressed interest in energy leases. Hydroelectric projects on the Forest are very small and nationally insignificant. The Revised Plan does not make any oil or gas leasing decisions. Those decisions would be made following a separate environmental analysis, if demand for leasing were to surface. The Forest reviewed the ***Western Regional Corridor Study (1992)*** in this process. The Revised Plan contains direction for allowing energy corridors on the Forest (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Physical Elements, Lands, Transportation and Utility Corridors). It is my determination that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 13212.

ROADLESS AREA CONSERVATION RULE

Management direction for IRAs was analyzed on a national scale through the Roadless Areas Conservation EIS, initiated by the Forest Service in the fall of 1999. In November 2000, the Forest Service issued the FEIS for the ***Roadless Area Conservation Rule*** in which the Preferred Alternative prohibited timber harvest and road building in IRAs.

On January 12, 2001, the ***Roadless Area Conservation Rule*** (RACR) was published in ***Federal Register*** (36 CFR 294). The RACR prohibited road construction, reconstruction, and cutting, sale

and removal of timber, with certain exceptions for the IRAs identified in the FEIS. However, timber harvest for stewardship reasons could be done. The RACR had an effective date of March 13, 2001. This effective date was later delayed until May 12, 2002.

Later, several groups and States sued the Forest Service. The Idaho District Court agreed with their claims and on May 10 of 2001, the RACR was enjoined, thus never became effective. Several environmental groups appealed this decision to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. On December 12, 2002, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals in a split decision reversed the injunction imposed by the lower Court. The Plaintiffs have requested that the entire Ninth Circuit panel of judges review the ruling. This request is pending. The District Court's injunction is still in place until the Ninth Circuit issues a mandate to the lower court to lift the injunction.

On July 10, 2001, the Secretary of Agriculture published an advance notice of proposed rulemaking (ANPR) in the ***Federal Register*** requesting comments from the public on key issues that have been raised regarding the protection of IRAs. In it were listed 5 principles to consider when addressing the long-term protection and management of IRAs.

1. Informed decision-making
2. Working together
3. Protecting forests
4. Protecting communities, homes, and property
5. Protecting access to property

Although the RACR was not in effect at the time the DEIS was issued in May of 2001, the preferred alternative in the DEIS, Alternative 7, incorporated the prohibitions of the RACR. Based on public comments and Department direction, the Forest determined it would be necessary to re-evaluate IRA management between issuance of the DEIS and FEIS for the Revised Plan.

In preparation for the Revision of the Caribou NF Revised Plan, the Forest reviewed IRAs as required by 36 CFR 219.17. In 1996, the Caribou NF updated IRA boundaries to reflect changes in the undeveloped character of these areas that had occurred between 1985 and 1996. Through this process the Caribou NF roadless inventory was updated (Roadless Area Re-inventory for the Caribou National Forest and Curlew National Grassland; USDA-FS, June 1996).

When the nationwide Roadless Area Conservation process was initiated, the Forest reviewed the 1996 inventory. It was determined that the same IRA boundaries would be used for the 2000 Roadless Conservation FEIS.

Next, the Forest conducted an Inventoried Roadless Area Re-evaluation, explained in detail in Appendix R of the FEIS, which recommends management strategies for the IRAs. Boundaries used for the 2000 Roadless Conservation FEIS were not changed during this process. Instead, the Forest looked at the attributes of each IRA, starting with those used in the 2000 Roadless Area Conservation FEIS, and determined how the areas should be managed. The Forest used the five principles for management listed above to assist in the re-evaluation of each IRA. The recommendations from this re-evaluation process were incorporated into the FEIS Alternative 7R and Revised Plan. Under Alternative 7R, there would likely be timber harvest on approximately 1,525 acres of 730,000 acres of Inventoried Roadless Area over the next decade. Alternatives 4, 5, 6, and 7 in the FEIS applied the RACR in its entirety.

I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with current Forest Service policy on Inventoried Roadless Area management. Since this direction is subject to change, the Caribou NF will follow the most current direction for management of IRAs. If the RACR does become effective it will supercede this Revised Plan, but only in those areas included in the RACR inventory used in the 2000 RACR FEIS. Those areas in Alternative 7R that are identified as available for treatment could not be treated unless they meet the exceptions in the RACR.

TRANSPORTATION RULE AND POLICY

On January 12, 2001, The Chief of the Forest Service signed the ***Administration of the Forest Development Transportation System; Prohibitions; Use of Motor Vehicles Off Forest Service Roads*** (Transportation Rule), **and** ***Forest Service Transportation, Final Administrative Policy*** (Transportation Policy). The Transportation Rule and Policy provide guidance for transportation analysis – they do not dictate or adopt land management decisions.

The Transportation Rule requires the Forest Service to identify a minimum road system, determining which roads are needed (classified) and which roads are unneeded (unclassified). Decisions are to be accomplished through area/project planning and documented through the NEPA process, including full public participation. The Revised Plan includes an objective to "...initiate site specific travel planning" within 3 years of signing this ROD (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Forest Use and Occupation, Transportation, Objective 1).

Beginning on January 12, 2002, the Transportation Policy requires a roads analysis (watershed or project-area scale) be prepared before most road management decisions are made to inform those decisions to construct or reconstruct roads. This roads analysis is not a formal decision-making process. Road management decisions are made through the NEPA process with full public participation and involvement.

The Forest Wide Roads Analysis Report for the Caribou NF was completed in December of 2002. The information in that report has been considered in my decision. In addition, the Caribou NF is conducting road analysis where required as a routine part of project analysis. The Revised Plan contains a standard that "...roads analysis...shall be used to inform road management decisions; including construction, reconstruction, or obliteration of roads." (Revised Plan, Chapter 3, Forest Use and Occupation, Transportation, Roads, Standard 1).

How the Revised Forest Plan addresses the planning issues

One of the major reasons I have selected Alternative 7R is because it responds positively and thoroughly to the identified planning issues. The following is my evaluation of the Selected Alternative's response to each of the planning issues.

ROADLESS AREA MANAGEMENT AND RECOMMENDED WILDERNESS

Recommended Wilderness

The Revised Plan recommends two areas for Wilderness designation—Caribou City and Mount Naomi. The Caribou City area was not recommended for Wilderness designation in the 1985 Plan. Based upon the analysis documented in the FEIS, the Caribou City area reflects Wilderness characteristics better than the Worm Creek area recommended in 1985. The Selected Alternative

will prohibit motorized use in Recommended Wilderness in the snow-free season but allows motorized use in the snow season. Many people believe that Alternative 6, which restricts motorized use in the winter, would protect IRAs more effectively. I believe that Alternative 7R adequately ensures protection of the Wilderness characteristics of the Mount Naomi and Caribou City Recommended Wildernesses pending action by Congress.

Inventoried Roadless Area Management

Following the Secretary of Agriculture's direction and the process outlined in the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, the Caribou NF reviewed environmental and social characteristics of each IRA in 2002. This information was used to determine how each IRA should be managed. Mixes of prescriptions were analyzed for IRAs on the Caribou NF. (See Appendix R: Roadless Area Re-evaluations and Map 12: Inventoried Roadless Areas on the Caribou National Forest.) In Alternative 7R, a variety of management prescriptions will be applied to IRAs considering Forest-specific conditions.

The Roadless Area Re-evaluation considered individual IRA characteristics and applied prescriptions in light of those specifics. For example, in the Revised Plan some areas within IRAs will be managed for non-motorized recreation and wildlife security; others will allow timber harvest and road construction.

Approximately 63,154 acres (8%) of IRAs are within Management Prescription 5.2: Forested Vegetation Management. Of these, 30,700 acres are considered suitable for timber harvest. These are primarily located in IRAs surrounded by a considerable amount of past harvest. In some cases, due to more refined mapping, we have found that there are timber harvest units within the IRA boundary. These areas will be managed under Management Prescription 5.2. The modeling used for the Plan predicted that 1,525 acres of timber would be harvested in IRAs to contribute towards the ASQ. Projected harvest in IRAs was put in the Non-interchangeable Component[3] (NIC) of the ASQ. This means that if that volume could not be found due to environmental or social considerations, the Forest may not harvest elsewhere to "make up" that volume on the suitable timber base. Conversely, approximately 6 percent of the IRAs will be managed very restrictively, either as Recommended Wilderness or as a Research Natural Area. On 45 percent of the IRA acreage, management will be generally restrictive but will allow vegetation manipulation where needed for hazardous fuels reduction, or restoration of vegetation conditions. Another 41 percent of the IRA acres are generally non-forested and will be managed under a big game winter range management prescription (2.7.2) or rangeland vegetation management prescription (6.2).

Most of the phosphate mineral reserves on the Caribou NF are located within IRAs. Application of the RACR in Alternatives 4, 5, 6, and 7, would severely limit the ability of leaseholders to recover mineral resources. Exploration activities would be limited under any of these alternatives due to prohibitions on road construction. These restrictions would be in direct conflict with the Minerals Leasing Act, which directs agencies to allow recovery of mineral resources. Development and roading is evident throughout the "phosphate patch". Despite this, some areas still meet the criteria for an IRA. While I believe it is important to protect IRA characteristics, it is also important to allow extractive uses of the natural resources as proposed in the Revised Plan. The effects of this activity on IRAs are disclosed in the Chapter 4 in the FEIS.

[3] Non-interchangeable component: A portion of the ASQ which cannot be substituted for from other areas or species types. Volume programmed from a NIC will not be replaced by volume from other areas of the Forest.

RECREATION AND ACCESS

Recreation and access was a planning issue identified at the beginning of the revision process. Public comment on this subject is highly variable, ranging from a desire to allow more motorized access and developed recreation experiences to people desiring complete abolition of motorized uses on the Caribou NF. The majority of those commenting on the Revised Plan raised concerns dealing with this issue. The range of alternatives analyzed in the FEIS reflects the continuum of public desires. Almost universally, the public has been in favor of limiting motorized access to designated routes in the summer. In Alternative 7R, this would occur on 97 percent of the Forest; the remaining 3 percent allow cross-country motorized use in the snow-free season. The Revised Plan prescription areas have access standards that range from allowing summer cross-country motorized travel near Soda Springs, Idaho, to restricting winter cross-country non-motorized travel in critical elk and deer winter range. These prescriptions provide a mix of motorized and non-motorized recreational activities. The route density limits generally match current opportunities. In a few areas, some routes (approximately 40 miles) would have to be closed to meet density standards. The determination of the actual road and trail network will be done during travel planning, which the Forest will initiate within three years of this decision.

While some people are not completely pleased with where the designations are located or how much (or little) of one use is allowed, they do not contest that the Revised Plan has provided a variety of opportunities. Other alternatives may respond better to one group or another but Alternative 7R responds to public comments about specific areas and provides a better mix of opportunities. Some examples are listed below:

- Four areas were designated as closed to motorized vehicles year long: Bear Creek, Mead Peak, Toponce and the back side of Pebble Creek ski area. The Portneuf Uplands ecological subsection will emphasize non-motorized winter recreation opportunities, including developed alpine skiing.

- Several areas in the Caribou Range and Preuss Ridges subsections are designated with a non-motorized recreation and wildlife security management prescription (3.1), and will be non-motorized in the snow-free season. Management emphasis in the Caribou Range ecological subsection will be to retain the primitive and semi-primitive recreation opportunities.

- The Revised Plan recognizes conflicts between recreationists and livestock and in the suitability analysis it was determined that the road corridors within the dispersed camping prescription area will be unsuitable for livestock grazing.

- The Revised Plan contains direction to work with user groups to identify additional areas to accommodate non-motorized recreation in winter.

- Two new special emphasis areas have been designated: Caribou Mountain management prescription (2.1.4) and Lander Trail management prescription (2.1.5). Both of these prescriptions are aimed at preserving and interpreting the unique historic properties of the sites.

RIPARIAN/WETLAND AREAS AND LIVESTOCK GRAZING

According to information in the AMS, approximately 10 percent of the riparian areas on the Forest are non-functioning and 35 percent are functioning-at-risk. This situation was identified early in the revision process and has led to developing management direction to improve riparian areas and fish

habitat. The Caribou NF provides habitat for the Bonneville and Yellowstone cutthroat trout among many other species. Riparian and fish habitat conditions are also a significant public issue. The alternatives considered provide a range of protection with different rates of improvement.

The Revised Plan establishes general riparian guidance as well as a designating an Aquatic Influence Zones management prescription (2.8.3), providing direction for maintenance and restoration of riparian and aquatic ecosystems. The Plan contains specific riparian condition indicators that were developed using local conditions and relevant information from conservation strategies for Bonneville and Yellowstone cutthroat trout and other native fish. It establishes direction for coordination with other Federal, State, and local agencies to improve aquatic habitats and meet water quality standards. Direction in the Revised Plan is extensive and will ensure maintenance and improvement of riparian conditions while allowing management activities. More importantly, the direction in the Revised Plan has been tailored to meet the conditions and needs on the Caribou NF.

Some of the most widespread impacts to riparian areas result from livestock grazing. The Forest recognized a need to develop standards and guidelines for livestock grazing in riparian areas and the adjacent uplands. The Revised Plan adopts Forest-wide grazing utilization and stubble height requirements. The Caribou Riparian Grazing Implementation Guide (Guide) would be used to set livestock management standards in riparian areas and monitoring compliance with those standards. Using the Guide, standards will be developed based on specific stream attributes rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach used in other Alternatives. These standards provide for improving and maintaining riparian, stream channel, and aquatic values and will allow livestock grazing compatible with these resource values. While Alternative 6 would provide more rapid improvement of riparian conditions and fisheries habitat, it would do so at the expense of a significant portion (over half) of the existing livestock grazing program. The riparian standards for grazing in the Revised Plan are based on extensive research and conditions specific to the Caribou NF. I believe that these standards will cause riparian and watershed conditions to improve while allowing livestock grazing to continue.

In addition, only Alternative 7R includes management emphasis items for ecological subsections. These include:

- Restoration of deteriorated rangelands will be a management emphasis in the Basin and Range, Bear River, Preuss Ridges, and Webster Ridges ecological subsections.

- Restoration of Yellowstone and Bonneville cutthroat trout stronghold populations in six of the seven ecological subsections.

VEGETATION AND ECOSYSTEM MANAGEMENT

To achieve long-term sustainability of ecosystems, a change in management emphasis on retaining and maintaining the processes and patterns occurring on the landscape was identified as a planning issue. The Caribou NF developed direction for desired vegetation structure and composition while reintroducing disturbance into these vegetative communities. The FEIS analyzed a variety of alternatives with varying treatment levels to move the Forest towards more sustainable conditions. Alternatives 1 and 3 had the highest probable treatment levels but little direction as to where and how those treatments would occur. Alternative 4 had high treatment levels aimed at moving closer towards HRV. Alternative 7R projects the lowest levels of treatments because adjustments were

made to reflect the Forest's ability to implement those treatments. Table 2 summarizes the vegetation management and timber program emphasis in the Revised Plan.

Table 2. Vegetation Management and Timber Program Emphasis in the Revised Plan.

Revised Plan	Measurement
Suitable acres	84,000 acres
Types of vegetation emphasized in treatments	Aspen/conifer, aspen
Suitable forested acres harvested in the 1st decade	6,100 acres
Unsuitable forested acres harvested in the 1st decade	5,000 acres
Estimated Allowable Sale Quantity per decade (million board feet)	27 mmbf
Miles of road needed for harvest activities per decade	35 miles

In the Revised Plan, several management prescription areas are aimed at restoring the ecological processes and vegetation across the Forest. Vegetation will be actively restored through management activities and allowing natural processes to proceed. Timber harvest would be allowed on unsuitable timberlands in order to meet desired future conditions. Given current and projected budgets, it is unlikely that the Forest can treat enough acres to keep up with natural succession, particularly in the non-forested vegetation communities. While the treatment levels predicted in the Revised Plan will not move vegetation closer to HRV in the long term, it provides the opportunity if available budgets and staffing allow. Treatments will be focused in specific areas and vegetation types in order to "make a difference" in key areas. The Revised Plan contains extensive direction for management and treatment of vegetative communities:

- Rejuvenation and restoration of young aspen on 20,000 acres within the first decade, on both suitable and non-suitable land. Aspen ecosystem restoration will be focused in the Caribou Range and Bear River ecological subsections.

- Management emphasis on wildland/urban interface fuel reduction projects in four of the seven ecological subsections. The Revised Plan also emphasizes the use of wildland fire to manage vegetation in more remote areas such as the Caribou Range and Basin and Range Ecological Subsections.

- In developing vegetation treatment projects, Forest managers will give priority to fuels reduction projects in the wildland urban interface.

WILDLIFE HABITAT MANAGEMENT

This issue is closely related those previously discussed. On the Caribou NF, big game winter range, riparian wildlife habitat, and retention of non-motorized areas for security are important wildlife concerns. The alternatives in the FEIS address these needs at varying levels. The Revised Plan addresses big game issues important to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game by designating winter ranges and assigning management prescription areas to emphasize big game security. Approximately 183,700 acres will be managed under a big game winter range management prescription and 41,200 acres will be managed for non-motorized recreation and wildlife security. Linkage habitat between the Caribou and surrounding National Forests and retention of large blocks of security habitat will be emphasized in the Caribou Range, Preuss Ridges, and Bear River ecological subsections. The Revised Plan will bring habitats closer to ecologically sustainable

conditions protecting long-term wildlife habitat values and productivity. The Plan will maintain habitat for threatened, endangered, and sensitive species. Conservation of management indicator, sensitive and listed species is addressed with Forest-wide standards and guidelines. The vegetation direction includes extensive guidance for mitigating effects to wildlife including goshawk, old growth dependent species requirements, snag and down woody debris standards, etc. Current guidance for landbirds, sage grouse, pygmy rabbits and other species has been incorporated into the Revised Plan.

Based on the risk assessments conducted during the analysis, the Revised Plan will maintain habitat capable of supporting viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species in the planning area and the Revised Plan is sufficient to provide well-distributed habitat for reproductive individuals.

OTHER PLANNING SSUES

Timber Sale Program

The timber sale program in the Revised Plan provides a non-declining even flow ASQ level, which does not exceed the quantity that the Forest is capable of producing on a sustained yield basis. The program also provides other forest products to the public including firewood, posts, poles and special forest products at a level in line with Forest Plan objectives, standards, and guidelines. The ASQ assigned to lands within IRAs has been included in the Non-Interchangeable Component.

Minerals Operations, Reclamation, and Hazardous Substances

The Revised Plan addresses minerals operations, reclamation and hazardous substance management by requiring the mine operators to use the most current science and research as it becomes available. Scientific research investigations and monitoring activities are currently addressing these issues and will be continued. Revised Plan direction provides a framework within which to operate while focusing on adapting improved technology and new Best Management Practices (BMPs). No leasing decisions for oil and gas are made in the Plan and no current lease applications are pending. Future lease applications will be addressed during site-specific analysis.

Social and Economic Environment

The mix of commodity and non-commodity uses provided by the Revised Plan addresses this issue. Other alternatives, such as Alternative 6, may address short-term resource needs more directly but that would come at the expense of social and economic considerations. The Revised Plan allows for extraction of renewable and nonrenewable resources while ensuring the maintenance of productive, resilient, and resistant ecological communities. This provides long-term social and economic benefits for the local communities dependent on the resources of the Caribou NF as well as the members of the public who enjoy the Caribou NF for reasons other than resource extraction. Tribal Trust responsibilities are addressed Forest-wide and in the Revised Plan they are a management emphasis in ecological subsections adjacent to the Fort Hall Indian Reservation.

Compatibility with Goals of other Governments and Tribes (36 CFR 219.7(c))

I considered comments received from public agencies, Indian Tribes, and elected officials in my decision making process. Based upon these comments. I have made a comparison between my Selected Alternative, and the goals and concerns expressed by the following:

Shoshone – Bannock Tribes

As discussed previously, the Revised Plan includes information and direction requested by the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. In the briefings with the Tribes throughout the planning process, they have indicated that the Revised Plan is compatible with their goals in that it recognizes Tribal Treaty Rights and trust responsibilities up front.

County, State and Federal Land Management Agencies

The Caribou Adjacency Analysis was conducted in 2000 and 2001 to discuss the proposed Plan with surrounding County, State, Tribal and Federal land managers. During this process, the Caribou NF determined that many of the issues being addressed in the Plan revision were the same ones other landowners were concerned with. In particular, fuels management along the wildland urban interface is a major concern for Counties surrounding the Caribou NF. The Revised Plan deals with this issue by prioritizing these areas, at the ecological subsection scale, for fuels treatments. The Plan also contains direction for completing Fire Use Plans at the ecological subsection scale. Access management is another big concern of local land managers. Open motorized route densities were established which maintain a range of hunting experiences and retain or improve big game security in specific areas.

Consultation with other agencies indicates that there are no major conflicts between the direction in the Plan and the goals and objectives of other government entities.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

Throughout the planning process, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDF&G) has been heavily involved. Big game winter range prescription maps are based largely on information provided by the Department and the management objectives developed by IDF&G were used as an indicator in the wildlife analysis. In many areas, road densities were determined based on the need to provide more big game security or to provide a specific type of hunting experience identified by the IDF&G.

Part 4 Findings Related to other Laws and Authorities

How does the Revised Forest Plan meet other laws or authorities?

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

Consideration of Long Term and Short Term Effects

The Revised Plan will govern management of the Caribou NF resources for the next 10 to 15 years. The FEIS discloses the analysis of effects for a range of alternatives including No Action. It considered in the analysis, effects to the significant issues and other resources for this time frame and projected over the next 100 years. In the Revised Plan, the Desired Future Condition (DFC) for vegetative communities is to move closer towards HRV. To achieve this DFC during the life of the Revised Plan would require a dramatic increase in vegetation treatments such as mechanical disturbance or prescribed fire. This is not achievable given current and anticipated staffing, budgets, and planning requirements. Nor would that level of disturbance be desirable from an environmental effects standpoint. All resources such as fisheries, wildlife, and soils, are dependent upon healthy and sustainable vegetative communities. Wide-scale disturbance throughout the Forest to move rapidly toward HRV would have significant negative effects on those other resources in the short-term. Over the long-term, these same resources would benefit from more sustainable and productive ecosystems.

Land management actions permitted by the Revised Plan balance short-term effects and current program abilities with the long-term need for sustainability in the vegetative communities on the Forest. The objectives in the Revised Plan reflect a smaller, more achievable number of acres treated. These treatments will be focused in key areas and ecosystems. For example:

- Emphasis is placed on restoration and regeneration of the aspen communities on the Forest, particularly those areas where conifers are becoming dominant.
- Wildland urban interface fuel reduction is a management emphasis near several communities that could be at risk from escaped wildland fire.
- Treatments that improve big game winter range will be given priority in specific areas.

Human uses of Caribou NF natural resources are also a major consideration in the Revised Plan. The Revised Plan preserves current recreation opportunities without making large-scale changes. In general, motorized road and trail networks will be retained. Some areas currently managed as non-motorized have been designated as such to preserve their attributes. In a comprehensive review and evaluation of roadless characteristics of the 34 IRAs on the Forest, I have determined that active management is appropriate to restore ecological processes and move toward DFC in some areas. This will contribute to the long-term goal of moving towards HRV in the vegetative communities

on the Forest. Long and short-term effects are detailed further in the Final EIS, Appendices, and the Planning Record.

What are the adverse effects that cannot be avoided?

Preparation of the Revised Plan is a programmatic action and as such does not authorize any site-specific activity. Effects on the environment that might result from project level implementation of any of the alternatives analyzed in the FEIS include some unavoidable adverse environmental effects. Projected effects are discussed as irreversible and irretrievable effects in Chapter 4 of the FEIS.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative(s)

Regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require agencies to specify the alternative(s) considered to be environmentally preferable (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Forest Service policy further defines this as the Alternative that best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA. In determining the environmentally preferred alternative, I referred to the goals of Section 101which are to:

1. Fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations;
2. Assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings;
3. Attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences;
4. Preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain wherever possible an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice;
5. Achieve a balance between population and resource use, which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities; and
6. Enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources.

Alternatives 6 and 7R, the Selected Alternative, are the Environmentally Preferred Alternatives. Over the long term, Alternative 7R will cause "...the least damage to the biological and physical environment" (CEQ 40 Most Asked Questions, #6A). Over the short term, Alternative 6 would cause the least damage due to the substantial reduction in timber harvest and livestock grazing.

- Alternative 7R provides the best balance between maintaining ecosystem processes while considering the needs of mature timber and sagebrush obligates. The emphasis of this alternative is to restore aspen where it is seral to conifers and to move vegetation closer towards HRV. Since treatments would be directed at moving closer to HRV, the vegetation communities should become more sustainable, benefiting native wildlife species.

- While Alternative 6 would reduce livestock grazing, timber harvest, and motorized recreation, the lack of active vegetation management would not be environmentally preferable over the long term. Under this Alternative, vegetation would move further away from HRV, resulting in a loss of diversity over the long-term.

- Alternative 6 offers the best array of prescriptions to improve overall riparian conditions and fisheries habitat. Alternative 7R is in the middle of the range of alternatives. Improvements are expected to occur under Alternative 7R, albeit at a slower rate than Alternative 6.

- Alternative 6 provides the most protection from human uses for IRAs. The goals of Section 101 of NEPA require consideration of, among other things, a "...variety of individual choice" and "...balance between population and resource use." Given those parameters, Alternative 7R provides protection for IRA's while providing for a variety of choices, both now and into the future.

- Alternative 7R provides more for the social and economic needs of society than does Alternative 6. The latter focuses on non-motorized recreation and passive use of the environment.

NATIONAL FOREST MANAGEMENT ACT

Planning Regulations

When the Caribou NF revision effort began in August of 1999, the Agency's 1982 planning regulations were in effect. On November 9, 2000, new planning rules were adopted. However, the 2000 planning rule allowed ongoing revisions to be completed under the 1982 rule if: 1) the revision had begun before the 2000 rule was issued, or 2) the notice that the draft environmental document was available had been published in the ***Federal Register*** before May 10, 2001. The Caribou NF revision effort met the first criteria and has proceeded under the 1982 planning regulations.

Net Public Benefit and Present Net Value

The NFMA requires identification of the alternative that maximizes the Present Net Value (PNV) and how the Selected Alternative compares to this (36 CFR 219.12(j)(2)). According to the economic analysis displayed in the FEIS, Alternative 3 maximizes both financial and economic PNV. Alternative 3 has the highest PNV due to the higher level of timber harvest predicted. The economic PNV (public benefits minus costs) varies by only 4 percent between alternatives. The net value ranges from a low of $9,552 million for Alternative 6 to a high of $9,941 million for Alternative 3. The Selected Alternative has an economic PNV of $9,684 million. The financial PNV (Forest Service revenues minus costs) also does not vary much between alternatives. All alternatives have a negative financial PNV meaning that the cost of managing the forest resources exceeds inputs into the Treasury. Alternative 3 has the highest financial PNV ($-161 million) and Alternative 6 has the lowest ($-178 million). The Selected Alternative has a financial PNV of $-173 million.

While Alternative 3 maximizes PNV, The Selected Alternative provides the highest net public benefit. Many benefits associated with the Selected Alternative are not captured in fees or revenues. For this reason, the alternative that maximizes PNV is not the alternative that has the highest net public benefit. I have determined that the Selected Alternative has the highest net public

benefit because it best balances multiple uses of the Forest and fulfills the mission of the Forest Service.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (E.O. 12898)

As required by Executive Order, all Federal actions will consider potentially disproportionate effects on minority or low-income communities. Potential impacts or changes to low-income or minority communities within the planning area due to the proposed action must be considered. Where possible, measures should be taken to avoid negative impacts to these communities or mitigate adverse affects. As highlighted in the Social and Economic Environment section of the FEIS, few minorities reside within the planning area, and no communities are considered low-income. While there are individual households that are either minority or low-income, the communities as a whole are not.

Shoshone-Bannock Tribe members live within and surrounding planning area. Throughout the planning process, consultation between the Tribe and the Caribou NF has occurred. Further consultation has occurred during the preparation of the Final EIS and Revised Plan. The Tribe was also interviewed during development of the Caribou Adjacency Analysis. Based on information received during Tribal consultation, changes to alternatives and to the Revised Plan have been made. Continued consultation and consideration of communities and the Tribe will be conducted as project level analyses are completed under the Revised Plan. I have determined from the analysis disclosed in the FEIS that the Revised Plan is in compliance with Executive Order 12898.

ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT (ESA)

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) creates an affirmative obligation "...that all Federal departments and agencies shall seek to conserve endangered and threatened [and proposed] species" of fish, wildlife, and plants. There are six species listed as endangered or threatened that may inhabit the Caribou NF. A biological assessment (BA) was prepared and submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on June 27 of 2002. According to the BA, the Revised Plan may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the Canada lynx, bald eagle, and Ute Ladies'-Tresses; is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the gray wolf; and will have no effect on the whooping crane and yellow-billed cuckoo. (FEIS, Chapters 3 and 4; Issue 9: Wildlife Habitat, Appendix D: Viability Analysis; Biological Assessment prepared June 27, 2002; Concurrence Letter from USFWS dated September 25, 2002) Based upon consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I have determined that the Revised Plan is in compliance with the ESA.

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT/EXECUTIVE ORDER

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and as such does not authorize any site-specific activity. It includes direction to improve understory diversity in sagebrush stands and to improve overall riparian conditions as described above. The Revised Plan includes management direction specifically for landbirds (Revised Plan, Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Wildlife, Landbirds). The Revised Plan does not authorize any activities that would cause a decline in habitat for migratory bird species. Potential impacts to habitat from proposed vegetation treatments will be analyzed at the project level. I have determined that management and monitoring activities are in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and Executive Order of January 12, 2001.

CLEAN AIR ACT

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Some prescribed burning may occur during implementation of the Revised Plan. According to analysis disclosed in the FEIS, projected activities in all Alternatives are expected to meet air quality standards. Compliance with mitigation measures and smoke management plans will result in no adverse long-term effects. (FEIS, Chapter 4, Other Resources: Air Quality/Visibility Analysis) Potential impacts will be analyzed at the project level and will comply with Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah regulations. The Revised Plan protects air quality and complies with the rules, regulations, and permit procedures of the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality. Forest-wide direction included in Chapter 3 of the Revised Plan will ensure that air quality complies with the Clean Air Act and other State requirements (FEIS, Chapter 4, Other Resources: Air Quality/Visibility Analysis; Revised Plan Chapter 3, Physical Elements, Air Quality). I have determined that the Revised Plan will comply with the provisions of the Clean Air Act.

NATIONAL HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACT

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Projects undertaken in response to the direction in this Revised Plan will fully comply with the laws and regulations that ensure protection of heritage resources. The Revised Plan contains extensive direction for heritage resource management including ways to more fully integrate heritage resource management with other management activities (Revised Plan, Chapter 3, Forest Use and Occupation, Heritage Resources; FEIS, Chapters 3 and 4, Other Resources: Heritage Resources).

Several other laws apply to preservation of heritage resources on Federal lands. Since the Revised Plan does not authorize ground-disturbing activities, consultation with the Idaho, Wyoming, and Utah State Preservation Offices (SHPO) under the National Historic Preservation Act is not required. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribe was consulted during all phases of developing this Revised Plan. It is my determination that the Revised Plan complies with the National Historical Preservation Act and other Statutes that pertain to the protection of heritage resources.

CLEAN WATER ACT

The objective of the Clean Water Act is to "...restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the nation's waters." One of the Act's goals is to "...provide for the protection and propagation of fish, shellfish, and wildlife" and provide for "...recreation in and on the water" (33 U.S.C. 466 et seq., Title I, Section 101). Based on the analysis disclosed in the FEIS, I have concluded the Revised Plan satisfies the Clean Water Act.

The Revised Plan contains Forest-wide direction to ensure management activities maintain or improve watershed conditions (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Watershed and Riparian Resources). Specific direction pertaining to water quality and aquatic biota is detailed in Management Prescription 2.8.3. This Prescription 2.8.3 is applied to all water bodies, including ephemeral stream channels. It is designed to maintain or improve riparian area conditions and their function. One of the DFCs for this prescription is to restore water quality in public waters where beneficial uses are not supported and to maintain or improve water quality elsewhere (Revised Forest Plan, Management Prescription 2.8.3: Aquatic Influence Zone, DFC 4). Cumulatively this direction will ensure continued compliance with the Clean Water Act. (FEIS, Chapter 4, Issue 6: Riparian/Wetland Areas and Aquatic Biota)

ENERGY REQUIREMENT AND CONSERVATION POTENTIAL

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Because the scope of the proposed action is limited both in terms of geographic area and extent of activities, the analysis disclosed in the FEIS shows that the Plan will have little or no effect on current local energy use and offers no opportunity for energy conservation.

INVASIVE SPECIES (EXECUTIVE ORDER 13112)

The Revised Plan is a programmatic action and does not authorize any site-specific activity. Executive Order 13112 on Invasive Species directs that Federal agencies should not authorize any activities that would increase the spread of invasive species. The Revised Plan includes direction, designed to limit the spread of invasive species (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plant Species). The Revised Plan limits cross-country motorized travel thereby reducing one of the pathways by which invasive species are spread. The Revised Plan requires that integrated pest management methods be used to contain and control the spread of invasive species following the latest Caribou-Targhee Noxious Weed Strategy (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Noxious Weeds and Invasive Plant Species, Standard 4). Therefore, I have determined the Revised Plan is in compliance with E.O. 13112.

PRIME FARMLAND, RANGELAND AND FOREST LAND

The Revised Plan complies with the Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum #1827, requiring conservation of prime farmland, rangeland, and forestland. This Revised Plan manages the Forest with sensitivity towards adjacent private and public land uses. It includes guidance to cooperate with adjacent and surrounding landowners when conducting management activities on the Forest and to minimize impacts on their management.

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY, EFFECTS ON MINORITIES, WOMEN

The FEIS describes the impacts to social and economic factors in Chapter 4 and Appendix B, Issue 2: Socioeconomics. The Caribou NF is within lands traditionally used by members of the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. The Revised Plan will not have a disproportionate impact on any minority or low-income communities (FEIS, Chapter 4, Issue 2: Socioeconomics, Environmental Justice. I have determined that the Revised Plan will not differentially affect the Civil Rights of any citizens, including women and minorities.

WETLANDS AND FLOODPLAINS

The Revised Plan contains direction for improvements in the riparian areas and ensures compliance with State and Federal water quality standards. The Revised Plan establishes a Management Prescription 2.8.3, specifically designed to improve conditions in these areas (Revised Forest Plan, Chapter 3, Biological Elements, Riparian and Watershed and Riparian Resources, Chapter 4, Rx 2.8.3: Aquatic Influence Zones; FEIS, Chapters 3 and 4, Issue 6: Riparian/Wetland Areas and Aquatic Biota).

OTHER POLICIES

The existing body of national direction for managing National Forests remains in effect. Standards and guidelines included in the Revised Plan provide direction specific to the Caribou NF. A summary of national program and regional policy and goals can be found in Appendix A of the Revised Plan. Direction cited in Appendix A is incorporated by reference into the Revised Plan.

Part 5 Conclusion

Implementation

How and when will the Revised Forest Plan be implemented?

Implementation of this ROD may occur 30 calendar days after the Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision and FEIS is published in the ***Federal Register*** (36 CFR 219.10 (c)(1)). Implementation of the Revised Plan will be accomplished and tracked through the objectives detailed in Chapter 5, Table 5.1 of the Revised Plan. This schedule will be used to help design the Forest's annual program of work. It will also be used to formulate annual budget requests.

Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in the Revised Plan. Those decisions will be made after site-specific analysis and appropriate documentation in compliance with NEPA.

Transition to the Revised Forest Plan

The NFMA requires that "...permits, contracts, and other instruments for use and occupancy" of National Forest System lands be "consistent" with the Forest Plan (16 U.S.C. 1604(i)). In the context of a Revised Plan, NFMA specifically conditions this requirement in three ways:

1. These documents must be revised only "when necessary;"
2. These documents must be revised as "soon as practicable;"
3. Any revisions are "subject to valid existing rights."

Permits, contract and other authorizations which are determined by the Responsible Official to be consistent with this decision or which are adjusted to be consistent may proceed.

Most timber harvest decisions are implemented through a three-year contract. While a timber sale contract is a valid existing right, the terms of the contract allow modification. Therefore, modification of a timber contract under its terms would not violate the "valid existing right" provision. Nevertheless, I have decided not to modify any existing timber sale contracts solely due to the Revised Plan. It was assumed that these contracts would be executed according to their terms and these effects were disclosed in the FEIS. Finally, existing timber contracts will, in most cases, have been completed within three years. The decision is left to the Forest Supervisor to determine whether to modify decisions authorizing timber sales not currently under contract.

Other use and occupancy agreements are substantially longer than timber contracts. For example, grazing permits are generally issued for a 10-year term. These permits can be cancelled in whole or in part or otherwise modified, at any time during the term to conform with needed changes brought about by law, regulation, Executive Order, allotment management plans and subsequent Forest Plan amendment or revision. Changes in grazing permits may be made to achieve objectives identified in

Forest Plans, or other decisions. Modifications to grazing permits can be made by a letter, issuance of a new Term Grazing Permit, or use of a standard modification form. In the standard modification form, the authorizing officer may include as terms and conditions of the grazing permit those applicable standards and guidelines contained in the Forest Plan or decisions that specify appropriate management requirements. Allotment Management Plans and Annual Operating Instructions are incorporated as part of the Term Grazing Permit.

It is my intention to bring Term Grazing Permits into compliance with the Revised Plan in a two-step process:

1. Upon approval of the Revised Plan, all grazing permits will be modified either with a Standard Modification form or in the Annual Operating Instructions, as appropriate to include applicable direction. This includes, but may not be limited to, Standards and Guidelines for forage utilization and water and riparian resources.

2. When Allotment Management Plan NEPA documentation is completed per the Rescission Act [Public Law 104-19, section 504; July 27, 1995] schedule, all other applicable Revised Plan direction will be incorporated into the Term Grazing Permit and/or Allotment Management Plan, which is a part of the permit.

I find that applying the Revised Plan's standards and guidelines through this process will meet the "as soon as practicable" NFMA provision.

Other classes of "use and occupancy" agreements will be reviewed to determine whether or when the Forest Supervisor should exercise discretion to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan. Some decisions recently made but not yet implemented, will be reviewed, adjusted and implemented to meet the direction found in the Revised Plan. I expect that the decision maker for such projects will review the decisions to determine if adjustments need to be made.

The decision maker has the discretion, on a case-by-case basis, to modify pre-existing authorizations to bring them into compliance with the Revised Plan standards and guidelines. I find that the statutory criteria of "as soon as practicable" and excepting "valid existing rights" useful in exercising that discretion.

Administrative Appeals of My Decision

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217.3. A written notice of appeal must be filed with the Chief of the Forest Service within 90 days of the date that legal notice of this decision appears in the ***Idaho Statesman*** newspaper. Appeals must be sent to:

Chief of the Forest Service, Washington Office
14th and Independence, SW
201 14th Street
Washington, D.C. 20250

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:
Regional Forester of the Intermountain Region

USDA - Forest Service
324 25th Street
Ogden, UT 84401

Any notice of appeal must be fully consistent with 36 CRF 217.9 and include at a minimum:

- A statement that the document is a Notice of Appeal filed pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217.
- The name, address, and telephone number of the appellant.
- Identification of the decision to which the objection is being made.
- Identification of the document in which the decision is contained, by title and subject, date of the decision, and name and title of the Deciding Officer.
- Identification of the specific portion of the decision to which objection is made.
- The reasons for appeal, including issues of fact, law, regulation, or policy and, if applicable, specifically how the decision violates law, regulation, or policy.
- Identification of the specific change(s) in the decision that the appellant seeks.

Contacts

Where can I obtain more information on this Forest Plan?

More information on the FEIS and the Revised Plan can be obtained by contacting one of the following people:

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415 South Arthur Ave.
Pocatello, Idaho 83204
(208) 236-7500

Conclusion

For the past several years, Caribou-Targhee National Forest personnel have worked with members of the public, other agency personnel and Tribal members to produce this Revised Forest Plan. I am pleased to make my decision based upon solid relationships that have evolved through coordination and cooperation to ensure sustainable conditions for the ecological and human environments on the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

The Revised Plan evolved from alternatives formed from the best available science and the work of a dedicated interdisciplinary team of Forest Service employees. Science does not always provide definitive answers to complex resource management topics nor can any one field of science provide all

answers. Yet science can offer insight into the effects of management decisions and actions. In other words, good science can "clear the fog" and let us see which choice best lets us reach our goals.

The science supporting this plan was both biological and social. It is important to remember that discussions about the Forest are also discussions about people. While science can help explain the importance of fire, insects, and disease to the Forest, it can also help us understand the ties between the Forest resources and the people who are connected to the Forest.

I am pleased with the way science and public discourse helped bring the Revised Plan to completion. The challenge that remains before all of us is to work together to implement the Revised Plan. I fully understand that this particular goal can be difficult to achieve. But at the same time, I am confident that cooperation will unite us, because I believe that the concern we all have for the Forest is our common bond - that these lands remain productive and splendid - not only for the current generation, but for future generations as well.

FEB 19 2003

JACK G. TROYER
Regional Forester, Intermountain Region

Date

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