

CHAPTER III

PLAN RESPONSES to ISSUES, CONCERNS,

and OPPORTUNITIES

III. PLAN RESPONSES TO ISSUES, CONCERNS, AND OPPORTUNITIES

Regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act require the identification of public issues and management concerns. Consequently, the planning process is responsive to changing conditions. A public issue is a subject or question of widespread public interest identified through public participation relating to the management of National Forest System lands. A management concern is a problem requiring resolution or a condition constraining management practices identified by Forest personnel, including the Forest Management Team and the Core Planning Team.

An initial list of Forest-wide public issues and management concerns was developed from comments solicited from the general public, from past planning records, and from Forest personnel. A detailed discussion of the scoping process and the issues can be found in the planning records located at the Supervisor's Office in Vernal, Utah. This process yielded a number of individual issues and concerns which were grouped into broad categories and then summarized into thirteen major issues.

The potential to resolve these major issues was analyzed as part of the analytical portion of the planning process, the "Analysis of the Management Situation". Issues were addressed through one or more of the following processes:

1. Forest resource capability analysis using a mathematical computer model (FORPLAN),
2. Forest policies developed in response to the issues,
3. Forest management standards and guidelines, and/or
4. Prescriptions establishing specific management practices for management.

This chapter shows how the proposed Plan addresses and responds to major public issues, management concerns, and resource opportunities that have been identified during the planning process.

A discussion of the process used to identify the issues to be resolved in this Plan is found in Appendix A of the EIS. Additional information may be found in the public involvement records of the Forest and Table II-6 of the EIS.

The specific methods for resolving and implementing management actions for the thirteen issues dealt with are found in Chapter IV of the Plan. In that chapter the Forest's multiple-use goals and objectives are listed, as are the management prescriptions and associated standards and guidelines for each management area. Included with the management area discussion are the proposed and probable management practices.

The responses to the thirteen issues are as follows:

Issue #1 Transportation System Management

The High Uintas Wilderness is not available, by law, for road development. There will be no road system within those lands which have the minimum level prescription (Research Natural Areas), and the High Dispersed Recreation prescription applied.

Road system development for the remainder of the Forest will be done on a project basis. In accordance with release language contained in the Utah Wilderness Act of 1984, portions of some undeveloped areas can be roaded where such activities as timber, recreation, wildlife, energy, range, fire control, or oil and gas benefits are needed during the next decade. Roads will be constructed to the minimum standards needed to meet the design objectives. The next planning period will provide the opportunity to re-examine those roadless areas for wilderness.

Alternative J significantly reduces road construction associated with timber harvest. No roading for timber harvest is permitted on an area in excess of 200,000 acres during the first decade. This is shown on the map attached to the EIS. Area q is also protected through an undeveloped prescription.

Road closures for protection of wildlife and watershed resources will be determined on a case-by-case basis during project level planning.

Issue #2 Fuelwood Management

Current demand for personal-use fuelwood is 1.5 MMCF. The Forest currently has a 11.2 MMCF capability for fuelwood as a result of the beetle infestation. Due to other resource considerations some of the fuelwood is unavailable. Fuelwood harvest will be considered as an alternative in marketing timber products. Designated areas for fuelwood will be set up to reduce conflict with commercial timber sale operations and to meet wildlife and watershed objectives.

The fuelwood availability will continue through the second decade and drop to 5.8 MMCF yearly in the fifth decade, still well above the current 1.5 MMCF demand. Free use and charge areas will be designated allowing for fuelwood removal from logging slash, standing dead trees, aspen, and pole-sized stands needing thinning.

Issue #3 Watershed Management

Increases in water yield will be concurrent with the timber harvesting program. On a yearly basis, in the first decade there will be an increase of 3 MAC/FT. This figure includes all increases and not just those meeting quality standards. To accomplish the watershed restoration backlog, 57 acres per year are programmed for restoration to the year 2000. As these acres are restored, the proportion of water meeting quality standards will increase.

Concurrent with the timber harvesting program and the water yield increases, sediment will also be increasing. Standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan will be followed to reduce the impact of increased

sedimentation and mitigation measures will be incorporated in environmental analysis at the project level.

Issue #4 Range Management

The grazing capacity will increase assuming utilization by the proper class of livestock. The demand for a proper mix and utilization, however, is decreasing. This is resulting from a reduction in sheep grazing and conversion of sheep allotments to cattle allotments. Structural and range forage improvements will continue to maintain at least existing production and utilization levels.

Issue #5 Timber Management

During the first decade, the yearly allowable sale quantity will be 21 MMBF. This harvest level is based upon salvaging a portion of the dead lodgepole and ponderosa pine stands, and the sustained yield concept for the remaining live stands. The projection for the second decade is also 21 MMBF, after which the harvest levels will reduce to approximately 19 MMBF. The allowable sale quantity in the existing timber management plan is in excess of 25 MMBF. An increased number of acres will receive silvicultural treatments and this will reduce potential for insect epidemic and increase wood fiber production. New logging methods will be required to reduce environmental damage.

Issue #6 Wildlife Management

The proposed alternative will continue an even program for structural and non-structural habitat improvement for fish and wildlife. The mixture of management prescriptions should maintain or improve habitat diversity. Management indicator species will be monitored to assure habitat diversity is maintained. Maintenance of critical habitat for all species will be given high priority.

Issue #7 Recreation Management

Funding for operation and maintenance, along with investment dollars for developed sites and dispersed areas, are programmed to be significantly higher than for the current program. The established High Uintas Wilderness and the management of several large areas in a way that precludes timber harvesting activities will help to maintain some of the existing primitive and semiprimitive non-motorized R.O.S. classes during the first decade. Public access to many areas in the roaded natural areas will be improved. With the additional funding, there will be opportunities to improve the types and numbers of developed sites and increase the length of the management season.

It is expected that demand will be met during the first five decades except for wilderness, which will probably be at capacity in decade two. With improved reporting of use, it is expected that actual use and demand projections will tend to equalize in the later decades of the planning horizon.

Issue #8 Landownership Adjustment

There is no indication that landownership adjustment is a needed high priority. As opportunities become available, the Forest will continue to acquire private inholdings. However, access to public lands is an ever increasing problem. The Forest Right-Of-Way Plan has just been prepared and approved. It identifies problem areas and provides a means of attaining the goal set forth in the RPA 80 update.

Issue #9 Fire Protection

The preferred alternative recognizes the need for other than immediate and complete control. Fire management planning will be scheduled during the first planning period to determine what level and where other fire management strategies can be applied.

Issue #10 Minerals and Energy

The High Uintas Wilderness is withdrawn from mineral entry except for valid existing claims. Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area is also withdrawn subject to valid existing rights except that the Secretary of Interior may allow the removal of leasable and non-leasable minerals under conditions prescribed by the Secretary of Agriculture. Sheep Creek Geological Area is withdrawn from mineral entry. The remainder of the Forest is open for exploration and development, except for specific site withdrawals for water projects, administrative sites, campgrounds, etc.. All exploration and development proposals are governed by standard and special stipulations, which protect surface resources and are contained in Appendix B.

Issue #11 Off-Road Vehicles

This activity is a recognized and accepted use of the lands of the National Forest and provides a variety of opportunities for user enjoyment. Through implementation of the TREAD LIGHTLY program, along with existing ORV closures now in effect on the Forest, this activity can and should continue. Criteria have been established which are aimed at protecting the basic soil, water, and visual resources from degradation by this activity. These Limits of Acceptable Change are contained in Appendix C and Appendix D.

The criteria along with the monitoring specified in Chapter V, for this activity, provides for sufficient management discretion to insure that ORV use does not damage sensitive and riparian areas.

Issue #12 Mountain Pine Beetle (Timber)

See Issue #5

Issue #13 Wilderness

This Issue was resolved by the 1984 Utah Wilderness Act and further evaluation of released areas is required until the next plan revision. An expanded discussion of this use and how it was resolved is contained in Appendix A of the EIS.