

Special Uses

Introduction

The Monongahela National Forest manages approximately 300 Special Use Permits in a given year, an estimated 64 recreation uses and 236 land uses. These permits vary in complexity and include uses such as organization camps, campground concessions, golf course, recreation events, outfitter/guide permits, vendor/peddler, ski slope, cultivation, natural gas pipelines, power line permits, road right-of-way permits, communication sites, and water uses.

2010 Program Accomplishments

The following Special Use Program activities were accomplished in FY 2010:

Lands Permits Processed – Target: 60 Accomplished: 30

The Forest accomplished 50 percent of the assigned 2010 target for Lands Permits Processed. This shortfall stemmed from the following factors:

- The 2010 target was 40 percent higher than typical accomplishments even though funding and staffing actually decreased. The 2010 target assigned to the Monongahela appeared to be based on the Forest's unusual 2009 accomplishment of 58 Lands Permits Processed. Since 2006, the Forest's annual Lands Permit Processed accomplishment has been 35 to 37 permits, averaging 36. In 2009, however, the Forest was able to accomplish 58 Lands Permits Processed because over half of the processed authorizations were simple, straight-forward permit amendments to document the inclusion of newly completed communication site plans. Such amendments take little time to process compared to most special use authorizations.
- Increased number of complex and time-consuming permits to process. The Forest is actively working toward consolidating power line, phone line, and gas line permits. As permits expire, or as new requests are received, the Forest has been coordinating with utility permit holders to develop one "Master Permit" for each company to replace the 6-21 separate permits they currently hold. Developing these "Master Permits" takes a significant amount of time because the Forest is gathering field-validated information from Holders to update the Forest's GIS information, permit maps, and permit descriptions, and to develop effective operating plans.
- Increased personnel time spent coordinating maintenance activities of existing Special Use Permits instead of authorizing new permits. In 2010, numerous maintenance activities were proposed for existing authorized Special Use Permits, requiring staff to spend a considerable amount of time administering existing permits instead of processing new permits.

Lands Permits Administered to Standard – Target: 58 Accomplished: 79

To ensure authorized uses of National Forest System lands remain consistent with Forest Plan and agency direction and do not adversely affect natural resources, the Forest attempts to have at least one-third of its lands permits administered to standard each year. In 2010, 33 percent of the lands Special Use Permits authorized on the Monongahela National Forest were considered administered to standard, exceeding the regionally assigned target by 21 permits.

Recreation Permits Administered to Standard – Target: 38 Accomplished: 37

The Forest attempts to ensure at least half of its recreation permits are administered to standard each year. In 2010, 58 percent of the Forest's recreation permits met Administered to Standard criteria, 97 percent of the Forest's regionally assigned target.

Monitoring and Evaluation**Monitoring Question 28: Does management of special forest products, recreation/wilderness, and other special use permits meet Forest Plan and agency direction?**

This item is monitored at twice: first at the time a Special Use proposal is submitted and before it is accepted as an application; and second, after a permit has been issued and an onsite inspection is completed. Onsite inspections of Special Uses are completed on an annual, biennial, and triennial bases, depending on the type of use and as defined in the Forest Service Special Use Manual (FSM 2716.53). Monitoring ensures that Permit Holders comply with Special Use Permit terms and conditions and evaluates what, if any, resource effects result from the authorized land use.

All 2010 proposals were screened to determine if they met Forest Plan and agency direction and were rejected or modified to ensure consistency. All permits authorized in 2010 met Forest Plan and agency direction.

Onsite inspections revealed that some authorized uses needed to be brought back into compliance with Special Use Permit terms and conditions (e.g., some authorized roads needed grading or improvements to bring them into compliance with permits terms and conditions; some gas equipment was showing rust and needed painting or replacement; rodent occupancy was evident at some communication sites; some Holders had failed to submit required insurance information in a timely manner, etc.) but all inspected uses met Forest Plan direction.

Monitoring Question 28. Evaluation, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Screening Special Use proposals and field monitoring authorized uses is working to ensure Special Use authorizations meet Forest Plan and agency direction. It is recommended that personnel continue to address public demand of National Forest System lands and ensure Special Use Program objectives are met. Special Use inspections need to continue to be completed to document conditions of concern and ensure improvements are made as needed.