

Executive Summary

The FY 2010 M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) Report provides an evaluation of monitoring performed on the NFGT (National Forests and Grasslands in Texas), as required by the *Plan* (1996 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan). The report provides monitoring item descriptions, the variability that is allowed before additional action is required and the FY 10 Findings and Recommendations for Change. Based on these findings, a 2011 Action Plan was prepared. The Action Plan also includes a listing of actions from previous years that have not been completed to date. This process allows managers to adapt their plans to changing conditions, and helps focus monitoring and evaluation efforts for the coming year.

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

Issue A. Ecosystem Condition, Health and Sustainability

Sub-Issue 1. Biological Diversity

- The regeneration of longleaf pine continued in FY 10. Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2010 found that 23.4 percent of the seedlings have survived. First-year survival exams found that 40.2 percent of the seedlings had survived.
- The FSVeg age-class distribution report for the end of 2010 shows a continuing trend towards an older forest.
- In FY 10, the NFGT prescribed burned approximately 148,903 acres. The *Plan* set an annual objective of approximately 100,000 acres of prescribed burning per year.
- The majority of management indicators have indicated stable or increasing trends through the past five-to-ten years. The RCW (red-cockaded woodpecker) population is at 383 active clusters, a new milestone for the NFGT. Only the Yellow-throated Vireo and Wood Thrush appear to have downward trends.
- Habitat for MIS (Management Indicator Species) is generally improving throughout the forests and grasslands. Increased prescribed fire efforts are revealing greater improvements in both the number of certain element occurrences and quality of each occurrence for fire-dependent plant species.
- Most resident T&E (Threatened and Endangered) and Sensitive Species populations are increasing. RCW populations are at an all-time high.

Sub-Issue 2. Forest and Range Health

- Air quality monitoring on the NFGT indicated units did not exceed the NAAQS (National Ambient Air Quality Standard) PM (Particulate Matter) 2.5 level.
- No SPB (southern pine beetle) infestations were detected on the NFT (National Forests in Texas) in FY 10. The NFT participated in the SPB survey and results from the survey predicted extremely low populations, as no SPB were captured.
- NNIPS surveys were conducted forest-wide. This survey focused on primary vectors for infestations such as utility right-of-ways, special use sites, recreation sites, and road right-of-ways.

Sub-Issue 3. Watershed Conditions

- No soil and water disturbances occurred that were identified by NFGT personnel as exceeding the soil loss tolerance levels set out in the *Plan*.
- As part of the NFGT's endeavors to protect soil and water resources in FY 10, the Caddo and LBJ NGs continued to implement an active Watershed Improvement Program.
- In 2010, TFS (Texas Forest Service) conducted a BMP (Best Management Practices) compliance review on the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas. The compliance reviews were conducted on the Angelina/Sabine National Forest.
- The condition of ninety-seven 6th-level watersheds within and adjacent to national forest lands in Texas were assessed using protocols from the Forest Service Watershed Condition Classification Technical Guide.

Issue B. Sustainable Multiple Forest and Range Benefits

Sub-Issue 1. Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- Law Enforcement Officials continued their patrols of OHV (off-highway vehicle) use areas and issued citations to users for violations of riding laws and for creating unacceptable resource damage.
- During FY 10 the NFGT continued the process to implement the TMR (Travel Management Rule) regulations (36 CFR Parts 212, 251, 261, and 295). The TMR was finalized and published on November 9, 2005 (70 FR 68264). The TMR requires that each unit of the NFGT (the Sam Houston, Davy Crockett, Sabine, and Angelina NFs as well as the Caddo/LBJ National Grasslands) determine which roads, trails, and areas would be open for motorized vehicle use in a separate process and publish a Motor Vehicle Use Map (MVUM) designating

those roads, trails and areas open for motorized vehicle use on each unit. MVUM maps are updated annually by unit and distributed to Forest users.

Sub-Issue 2. Infrastructure

- All road construction in FY 10 was in compliance with contract specifications and the *Plan's* Standards and Guidelines.
- In FY 10, all maintenance Level 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 roads had condition surveys conducted and current or new data was entered into the INFRA data base.
- A total of 41.1 miles of road reconstruction was accomplished. All of these miles included wing ditches with appropriately designed J-hooks to mitigate potential erosion problems that were identified in previous M&E reports.
- Because of hurricane damage by storms, Rita and Ike and the amount of land line boundary re-survey work that has and will be accomplished under the hurricane contracts, the National Forests are catching up with the 10 year rotation criteria for landline maintenance in the Forest Plan.
- Ground was broken for the new NFGT Supervisor's Office at the old administrative site in Lufkin, Texas in November 2008. Work continued on the new office through FY 2010. The 18,000 square-foot facility will be constructed using the agency's new "green" standards. The building should be ready for occupancy in early 2011.

Sub-Issue 3. Human Influences

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

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

- A National Visitor Use Monitoring (NVUM) survey was completed in FY 09. The final report was released in FY 2010. The survey revealed that visitor use of wilderness areas remains low.
- The NFGT prepared an Environmental Assessment to allow prescribed burning for fuel reduction in Upland Island Wilderness on the Angelina National Forest. The burns will be implemented in FY 2011.

Sub-Issue 5. Timber

- For the last ten years, an average of 21.0 percent of the *Plan* specified ASQ (Allowable Sale Quantity) has been sold. Since the probability of exceeding ASQ is unlikely, this is not a real issue for the NFGT.
- The NFGT needs to identify areas of concern and develop associated project plans to build up the timber harvesting program in order to meet *Plan* target levels and meet resource-related needs.
- Project plans, prescriptions, environmental assessments and decision documents that were developed in FY 10 were reviewed and found to be in compliance with the *Plan*.
- Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2010 found that 84.6 percent of the stands exceeded the lower level of the FW-204-1 standard for the planted species. Stands that were below minimum survival levels (for planted seedlings) were checked for stocking. Enough natural seedlings were established to increase the total stand stocking levels (planted and natural seedlings) above the *Plan* minimum level for most of the deficient.
- No timber was harvested on unsuitable lands solely for timber management purposes.

Sub-Issue 6. Forage

- Grassland range allotments are being managed in a satisfactory condition of “fair to good.” In FY 10, the Caddo and LBJ NGs continued to implement a fundamental change in grazing schemes that began in 1998. The focus changed from year-round grazing to a seasonal grazing system.

Sub-Issue 7. Other Products

- Mineral operations inspections in FY 10 indicated most activities were in compliance with the permit conditions and operating plans. There was 1 reported oil spill on the LBJ National Grasslands (LBJNG) in 2010. On June 22, 2010, the LBJ became aware of a broken oil/gas gathering line in the northern section of Unit 41 in Wise County, TX. Aspen Oil Company is the responsible party for this pipeline. Approx. 3,000 barrels of a mixture of oil/saltwater had spilled into the unnamed creek. The environmental firm of Eagle Environmental conducted soil and water sampling. Sampling occurred every 200 feet of affected streambed and conformed with approved USFS NFGT testing guidelines.

Sub-Issue 8. Heritage Resources

- In FY 10, there were no projects which implemented *Plan* Standards and Guidelines that adversely affected historic properties.

Issue C. Organizational Effectiveness

Sub-Issue 1. Economics

- The NFGT is no longer allocated funds based on a percent of its need (as identified in the *Plan* as funds needed to accomplish its goals and objectives.) In FY 10, the NFGT's expenditures were \$22,186,747 as compared to the *Plan*'s projected average budget needs of \$26,657,400.

Sub-Issue 2. Evaluating New Information

The following provides updates for a several issues affecting the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas.

National Forest System Litigation

2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule – During FY 2010, activity continued in this on-going lawsuit, but it mostly involved the Colorado and Idaho. In addition, the following events occurred because the Secretary wanted to assure the careful evaluation of actions in inventoried road less areas while long term roadless policy is being developed and relevant court cases move forward.

- On May 28, 2010, Secretary's Memorandum 1042-155 reserved to the Secretary the decision making authority over the construction and reconstruction of roads and the cutting, sale, or removal of timber in inventoried roadless areas on certain lands administered by the Forest Service.
 - In addition, the Under Secretary was re-delegated authority concerning road construction, road reconstruction, and incidental timber cutting within inventoried roadless areas that was associated with operations of locatable mining activities undertaken pursuant to the United States Mining Laws.
 - The Chief of the Forest Service was re-delegated authority to approve:
 - Any necessary timber cutting or removal or any road construction/reconstruction in emergency situations involving wildfire suppression, search and rescue operations, or other imminent threats to public health and safety in inventoried roadless areas.
 - Timber cutting, sale, or removal in inventoried roadless areas incidental to the implementation of an existing special use authorization. Road construction/reconstruction is not authorized through this re-delegation without further project specific review.
 - The cutting, sale, or removal of generally small diameter timber when needed for one of the following purposes:

- To improve threatened, endangered, proposed, or sensitive species habitat;
- To maintain or restore the characteristics of ecosystem composition and structure, such as to reduce the risk of uncharacteristic wildfire effects within the range of variability that would be expected to occur under natural disturbance regimes of the current climatic period; or,
- For administrative and personal use, as provided for in Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations 223, where personal use includes activities such as Christmas trees and firewood cutting and where administrative use includes providing materials for activities such as construction of trails, footbridges, and fences.

In the event employees decide to plan projects for any of the designated roadless areas located on the Sam Houston NF forest, they will follow the above established protocols.

Visit the Forest Service website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/> and look for a direct link to the Roadless website for the most up-to-date information.

Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (FSEEE) vs. USFS, USFWS and National Marine Fisheries Service - In response to a 2010 court decision, the U.S. Forest Service is preparing a draft environmental impact statement that will help inform the agency's decision whether to continue aerial application of fire retardant and, if so, under what conditions.

In July 2010, a U.S. District Court in Montana directed the Forest Service to develop the environmental impact statement after an organization sued the agency claiming that fire retardant drops were harming waterways. The release of the draft environmental impact statement is planned for FY 2011 and it will have a 45-day public comment period. There will be opportunities in several locations across the country for the public to interact with Forest Service specialists and learn more about fire retardant and the document.

For more information, see this topic under National News at <http://www.fs.fed.us/>.

b. Changes in Policy or Other Direction

National Forest System Land and Resources Management Planning Rule – Throughout 2010, the USDA Forest Service hosted a series of public meetings and conducted Tribal consultation to provide opportunities for input and dialogue on the development of a new planning rule. The Forest Service is considering the feedback received through these efforts, and using public input, the results of Tribal consultation, science, and agency expertise to develop the proposed rule and a draft environmental impact statement.

The public can visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/> and look for the link to information about the Planning Rule to find out more about this continuing process.

In FY 10 the NFGT made a total of \$3,319,786 in payments to counties that contain NFGT lands.