

Idaho Panhandle NF Draft Forest Plan – Questions and Answers

What is a Forest Plan?

A Forest Plan is an overall guide for what happens on a national forest. It is based on science, law, and input from citizens. Essentially, a Forest Plan establishes goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines throughout the Forest. The goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines are used to steer future management decisions and set consistent expectations for the types of activities permissible on the Forest.

What changes to the Forest Plan would be made under the preferred alternative?

The Forest's preferred alternative is Alternative B. In general, this alternative works to address both traditional issues and new challenges that have been identified since the last Forest Plan was completed in 1987.

The Draft Forest Plan creates 12 new management areas (MAs) to replace the 20 currently found in the 1987 Plan. Desired conditions, standards, and guidelines provide for a mix of recreational opportunities within the MAs. Motorized and nonmotorized opportunities exist across the Forest, based on MA allocation.

The Draft Forest Plan emphasizes restoration of vegetation and watersheds to provide increased resistance and resiliency towards disturbances and potential climate change effects. The Draft Forest Plan also emphasizes the use of both prescribed fires as well as lightning-caused wildfires to help trend vegetation towards desired conditions and reduce hazardous fuels. Through active restoration activities, timber is harvested to meet the demand for wood products and provide jobs to local communities.

The Draft Forest Plan includes collaboratively developed desired conditions by geographic areas (GAs). The GAs were developed as specific locations, such as a river basin or valley. They define a landscape that people associate with and reflect community values and local conditions. Local collaborative groups worked to agree on desired conditions for these areas.

Other noteworthy changes include recommending an additional 13,700 acres of recommended wilderness and primitive lands, establishing an objective to harvest 45 million board feet annually, updated standards and guidelines for wildlife and aquatic habitat, active and passive watershed restoration and the inclusion of potential effects resulting from global climate change.

Why is the Forest using the 2000 Planning Rule (amended with procedures from the 1982 Planning Rule) instead of waiting for the Planning Rule currently being developed?

The Idaho Panhandle and Kootenai National Forests have been working together since 2002 to update their Forest Plans. During this time the Forest Service revised the national forest planning rule on several occasions, but subsequent court injunctions prevented the Forest Service from implementing the new rules. In order to ensure that a final Plan could be completed on the Idaho Panhandle and Kootenai National Forests, and to ensure that years of work and public input would not be lost, the Forest Service agreed to allow the Forests to continue Plan revision efforts based on the procedures from the 1982 Planning Rule, which are still in place under the transition language of the 2000 Rule. Although the KIPZ revision uses 1982 planning procedures, it incorporates many of the best practices found in the 2011

proposed Planning Rule, including sustainability, collaboration, science, and an all lands approach. The Forest Service expects to publish a final programmatic environmental impact statement and new final Planning Rule early in 2012.

Why did the Forest retain certain decisions from the 1987 Forest Plan in the Draft Forest Plan?

The retained decisions have already gone through public review and consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and there is no new science that warrants changing the decisions. All retained decisions are listed as standards and are included in an appendix to the Draft Forest Plan. The retained decisions include:

- Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) (DN and FONSI, July 1995);
- Motorized Access Management within the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone (ROD, November 2011);
- Northern Rockies Lynx Management Direction (ROD, March 2007); and
- Western Energy Corridors Designation (ROD, January 2009).

Why did the acres of lands suitable for timber production decrease from the 1987 Forest Plan?

When the 1987 Forest Plan was originally released, lands suitable for timber production were identified as 1,584,100 acres. Since then there have been many changes to timber suitability as the Plan has been amended and implemented during the past two decades. These changes include reductions in lands suitable for timber production due to other resource management requirements, such as grizzly bear core areas, riparian areas, and old growth management. There have also been changes in data and land status resulting in updated figures for timber suitability. Using current conditions and updates based on Forest Plan amendments, the amount of land suitable for timber production under the 1987 Plan is now 928,900 acres. The Draft Forest Plan identifies 951,300 acres as suitable for timber production.

Why did Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) decrease from the 1987 Plan?

Monitoring of the 1987 Plan has shown the amount of timber sold over the last two decades has been well below the ASQ. The ASQ in the 1987 Plan was set at 280 MMBF/year for the first decade. The amount sold during the last ten years has averaged 45 MMBF/year. Reasons for the reduced sale volume include increased restrictions under INFISH, grizzly bear management concerns, increased protection for old growth, lack of access in inventoried roadless areas, and smaller budgets. Forest Plan amendments have reduced the acreage suitable for timber production. The ASQ under the Draft Forest Plan reflects timber volumes relative to current resource management requirements (riparian areas, grizzly bear, old growth and updated lands suitable for timber production).

ASQ is defined as a ceiling for timber harvest, independent of budgets, but the Draft Forest Plan also includes a predicted volume sold for the Forest based on current budget realities. The ASQ in the Draft Forest Plan is 125 MMBF/year and would require doubling the current forest budget. The predicted volume sold is 45 MMBF/year based on 2010 budget levels.

What is the difference between Primitive Areas and Recommended Wilderness?

Under the 1987 Plan, the use of motorized and mechanized equipment in proposed wilderness is allowed to varying degrees. Under the Draft Forest Plan, Primitive areas allow mechanized (mountain bike) or

winter motorized (snowmobile) use. Areas classified as Recommended Wilderness prohibit motorized and mechanized access.

How does the Draft Forest Plan meet the requirement to provide for diversity of plant and animal communities??

The Draft Forest Plan will maintain or enhance wildlife habitats by managing towards a desired condition that is based on an understanding of the historic range of variability for vegetative conditions as well as the consideration of potential climate change effects. The Draft Forest Plan also provides for wildlife habitats by allowing natural disturbance processes (e.g., fire) to function nearer to historic conditions. By doing so, the variety of habitats that native species would have evolved with would be provided into the future. Species would find the amounts and arrangements of habitats similar to what would have existed historically under natural disturbance processes. Some species, such as those with limited distributions or small populations, may need additional attention to ensure that their habitat requirements are met. This is done through additional direction in the Draft Forest Plan in the form of desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines.

How are Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) to be managed on the Idaho Panhandle NF?

There are 48 IRAs distributed across the Forest totaling approximately 850,000 acres. In the Draft Forest Plan IRAs are managed in concert with the 2008 Idaho Roadless Rule. The Idaho Roadless Rule classified lands in Idaho Roadless Areas into five different classifications: Wild Land Recreation, Primitive, Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Significance, Backcountry/Restoration, General Forest, Rangeland, and Grassland; and that would be managed according to the Idaho Roadless Rule (36 CFR 294 Subpart C). It also classified some areas, such as wild and scenic river corridors and research natural areas as Forest Plan special areas. On the Idaho Panhandle NF only Wild Land Recreation, Backcountry/Restoration and General Forest, Rangeland, and Grassland exists in the Idaho Rule. No lands were classified as Primitive or Special Areas of Historic or Tribal Significance.

How does the Idaho Roadless Rule affect the Idaho Panhandle NF Plan?

Under the requirements of the 1982 procedures, the Forest is required to study a range of alternatives. This range resulted in an alternative with a focus on active management to achieve desired conditions (Alternative D) and an alternative with an emphasis on natural processes and wilderness values (Alternative C).

Except for Alternative C, all alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement (including the preferred Alternative B) are consistent with the Idaho Roadless Rule. Alternative C analyzed more recommended wilderness across the Forest and because of this it is more restrictive than the Idaho Roadless Rule in some areas. The Idaho Roadless Rule and State of Idaho's petition (from which the rule was based) were land classification and management systems that are distinct from wilderness and therefore did not examine wilderness potential.

How is old growth to be managed?

The Draft Forest Plan includes changes to old growth management compared to the 1987 Forest Plan. The Draft Forest Plan contains a desired condition for increasing the amount of old growth in the future. The Draft Forest Plan emphasizes the development of the types of old growth that would be most resistant and resilient to forest insects and diseases, wildfires, drought, and other potential stressors such as climate change. The Draft Forest Plan also provides direction that management activities such as thinning and/or use of prescribed fire could be used in certain old growth stands under specific circumstances to increase the resistance and/or resiliency of the stands to undesirable disturbances, such as stand replacing wildfires

or insect epidemics. Timber harvest or other vegetation management activities would not be authorized if the activities would likely modify the characteristics of the stand to the extent that the stand would no longer meet the minimum old growth criteria.

How is the Forest managing wildlife habitat connectivity?

The Draft Forest Plan contains desired conditions, standards, and guideline specific to habitat connectivity. The desired condition is that forest management contributes to habitat connectivity between landscapes unless landscape isolation is determined to be beneficial to wildlife. Coordination between local, state, and federal agencies is used to ensure habitat linkages and to limit disruption to those linkages.

How is the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) to be managed?

The WUI comprises approximately 30 percent of the Idaho Panhandle NF. Desired conditions in the Draft Forest Plan strive to reduce hazardous fuels in the WUIs and fuel conditions that allow for safe and effective fire management. The desired condition is for a reduced risk of large, stand-replacing wildfires.

How is public access addressed under the Draft Forest Plan?

The Draft Forest Plan includes a goal and desired conditions for maintaining roads and trails to access the Idaho Panhandle NF. The number of miles of roads available for wheeled motor vehicle use would not change under the Draft Forest Plan. Wheeled motor vehicle use is allowed only on roads and trails designated on the Forest Motorized Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs).

Under the Draft Forest Plan, over-snow vehicle use is prohibited in designated wilderness, recommended wilderness, and research natural areas (RNAs). Approximately 70 percent of the Forest allows over-snow vehicle use in the Draft Forest Plan compared to 79 percent of the Forest in the 1987 Plan.

How was collaboration and public involvement conducted in developing the Draft Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement?

There has been a great deal of public involvement and collaboration since the Forest began plan revision in 2002. From April 2002, to May 2004, the Idaho Panhandle NF hosted public meetings, open houses, field trips, and workgroup meetings. Approximately 21 informational and comment meetings took place in local communities during the scoping process, which started in April 2002 and ended in May 2004. In addition to public meetings, briefings and meetings were held with interested Native American Tribes, Congressional representatives, elected officials, interested agencies, and interest groups.

The proposed Plan was released in 2006 (under the 2005 Planning Rule) and was developed based on the best available science and input from approximately 38 public workgroup meetings held between August 2003 and May 2004. The meetings were held in communities within the Idaho Panhandle NF and workgroups focused on the geographic areas surrounding each of the communities. The purpose of the workgroup meetings was to: 1) share information about the Plan revision topics; 2) collaboratively discuss and develop desired conditions for each of the revision topics within the workgroup's GAs; and 3) gain an understanding of the issues and appreciation of others' viewpoints.

Due to updated national planning rules and court injunctions halting the implementation of the 2005 and 2008 Rules, the planning process on the Idaho Panhandle NF experienced multiple delays. In order to ensure that the updated Forest Plan would be completed in an effective manner, and to ensure that the many years of public input would continue to be relevant, the Idaho Panhandle NF is proceeding with completing the planning process following the procedures of the 1982 Planning Rule. The current Draft Forest Plan reflects the input of the many collaborative meetings and public input.

How does the proposed 2011 Planning Rule affect the revision of the Idaho Panhandle NF Forest Plan?

The revision of the Forest Plan for the Idaho Panhandle NF is being conducted using the 1982 planning procedures, as allowed under the transition language of the 2000 Planning Rule. The Forest Service is currently developing a new rule to guide future Forest Plan revision. The proposed 2011 Planning Rule is expected to be completed about the same time as the Idaho Panhandle NF Forest Plan, so the new rule will not directly affect completion of the Idaho Panhandle NF Forest Plan. However, the draft Idaho Panhandle NF Plan already incorporates many of the best planning practices that were in the proposed rule, such as sustainability, collaboration, science, and an all lands approach.

What is the overall concept for management of watershed, soil, and aquatic resources in the Draft Forest Plan?

Draft Forest Plan direction is a more restoration-oriented and holistic approach to managing watershed, soil, and aquatic resources compared to the 1987 Forest Plan. The 1987 Forest Plan was more focused on protection of these resources, although restoration efforts have occurred. The Draft Forest Plan provides a combination of protection and restoration activities for watershed, soil, and aquatic resources to improve ecological health at the landscape scale. Watershed restoration is designed to facilitate the recovery of watershed functions and related physical, biological, and chemical processes that promote recovery of riparian and aquatic ecosystem structure and function and benefit native aquatic species.

What are the Management Indicator Species (MIS) in the Draft Forest Plan and why were they chosen?

The terrestrial MIS include elk and a landbird assemblage of insectivores. Elk was chosen as an MIS because elk security was identified as a concern due to the high profile and desirability of elk as a big game animal. Elk and elk habitat are also likely to overlap with management activities designed to move vegetation towards the desired conditions in the Draft Forest Plan. Those activities, and specifically the roads associated with them, could therefore impact elk security.

The landbird assemblage (insectivores) was selected because they would be expected to respond to progress made towards the desired conditions for vegetation. The individual species that comprise the landbird assemblage use natural features (such as openings, snags, large trees, shrub/forb/grass understory) that would be expected to change due to progress towards the desired conditions for vegetation in the Plan.

There is also a MIS for aquatic resources in the Draft Forest Plan. An assemblage of aquatic macroinvertebrates was chosen because they are a good indicator of water quality and overall watershed health across the planning unit. Macroinvertebrates include common bugs such as mayflies, stoneflies, and caddisflies.

Since mayflies, stoneflies and caddisflies are considered to be the most pollution-intolerant species found in freshwater streams and rivers, they are ideal indicators of water quality for several reasons: they live in water for most of their life cycle, remain in areas suitable for their survival, they are easy to collect, they differ in their tolerance to pollutants, they are relatively easy to identify in a laboratory, and information is already being collected across the entire landscape making it readily available.