



U.S. Forest Service

Summary of the Final Land Management Planning Rule

March 23, 2012

USDA Under Secretary Harris Sherman has signed the final National Forest System (NFS) Land Management Planning Rule. The final planning rule is available on the planning rule website and will be published in the Federal Register soon. The final planning rule was developed after more than two and a half years of public input, including more than 300,000 public comments. The Forest Service can begin using the final planning rule to develop, revise, and amend plans 30 days after publication in the Federal Register.

The final planning rule provides a framework to guide the collaborative and science-based development, amendment and revision of land management plans. This framework will promote healthy, resilient, diverse, and productive national forests and grasslands with a range of social, economic, and ecological benefits now and for future generations.

The planning process framework in the final planning rule consists of a three-part cycle:

- assessment,
- plan revision or amendment, and
- monitoring.

These three phases are complementary. The intent is to allow the Forest Service to adapt management to changing conditions and encourage more frequent amendments based on new information and monitoring.

The final planning rule strengthens the role of public involvement in the planning process and provides numerous opportunities for public participation and dialogue. It requires working with the public, partners, landowners, other government agencies, and Tribes in each phase of the planning process. It also requires that best available scientific information be used to inform the planning process and be documented, while also taking into account other forms of knowledge, such as local information, national perspectives, and native knowledge.

Under the final planning rule, an understanding of the landscape-scale context for unit-level management is required, since many management issues, such as fire, water, and wildlife, will require an understanding of what is happening both on and off NFS lands. Assessments are designed to rapidly identify and evaluate existing information and create an understanding of conditions, trends, and stressors. Utilization of these assessments will guide the development of plans.

In the face of changing environmental conditions and stressors, such as a changing climate, the final planning rule requires plans to include plan components to:

- maintain and restore ecosystem and watershed health and resilience (ecological integrity);
- protect key resources on the unit, including water, air, and soil; and
- address water quality and riparian area protection and restoration.

Responsible officials will take into account opportunities for landscape scale restoration, wildland fire, and fire-adapted landscapes as well as the various conditions that could affect the presence and function of ecological resources on the unit.

The final planning rule also requires plans to provide for plant and animal diversity. It uses a scientifically-supported approach to providing the ecological conditions to support both species diversity and the persistence of native species on the unit. Plan components will be required for ecosystem integrity and diversity, supplemented by species-specific plan components as necessary.

Plans will include plan components to contribute to social and economic sustainability, thereby supporting vibrant communities and rural job opportunities. Planning will consider a full suite of multiple uses of a plan area, including:

- outdoor recreation,
- grazing,
- timber,
- watershed,
- wildlife and fish,
- wilderness,
- ecosystem services, and
- other relevant resources, uses and values.

Plan components will be required to provide for sustainable recreation, which can include recreation opportunities on land, water, and in the air. The responsible official will consider issues such as renewable and non-renewable energy, opportunities to coordinate with neighboring land owners, habitat conditions to support hunting, fishing, trapping and gathering, and opportunities to connect people with nature. Plan components will be also required to protect cultural and historic resources and specially designated areas such as wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers as well as the management of areas of tribal importance.

The final planning rule creates a two-tiered strategy for monitoring at the unit level and at a broader scale. Monitoring allows responsible officials to test assumptions, track changing conditions, measure management implementation and effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, and feed new information back to inform adaptive management. The final planning rule also requires the Chief of the Forest Service to establish a national oversight process to ensure accountability and consistency in planning across the system.

Finally, the final planning rule creates a pre-decisional administrative review process to provide individuals and groups with an opportunity to resolve issues before final approval of a plan, plan amendment or plan revision.

Additional information about the Planning Rule is available electronically at:
<http://fs.usda.gov/planningrule>.