

Forest Plan Amendment No. 11:

Attached are replacement pages within the Monitoring Plan table in the Gila National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1986. The pages represent the 2006 decision amending the Gila National Forest Management Indicator Species (MIS) list to 10 indicator species. It was found that the 1986 plan list was outdated and many of the species were not good indicators of change due to land management activities. The 10 indicator species were selected to represent the major vegetation types potentially affected by management actions.

<u>Existing pages</u>	<u>Replacement Pages</u>
289	289, 289a
290	blank page, 290

Monitoring Plan

Items Monitored	Intent	Monitoring Method/Unit of Measure	Measuring Frequency	Percent Accuracy/Precision	Variability that would reinitiate re-evaluation
<p>WILDLIFE 1</p> <p>Population and habitat trends of State and Federally listed plants, animals, and sensitive species.</p> <p>High priority will be placed on gathering base data where management actions are likely to result in habitat changes.</p>	<p>Evaluate trends and meet Federal and State regulations. Assure that wildlife habitat will be maintained or increased and that sensitive species will be protected.</p>	<p>c) Threatened and Endangered Birds:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Single-season monitoring <p>d) State listed:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct counts 2. Monitor trends in habitat. <p>e) Sensitive Plants:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct counts 2. Monitor trends in habitat 	<p>c) T&E Birds: Annually</p> <p>d) State listed: Annually</p> <p>e) Sensitive Plants: Annually</p>	<p>+/- 20%; +/- 20%</p>	<p>Variation in indicator species above those projected would result in re-evaluation. Monitoring as described is tentative and exploratory: modifications may be needed to better indicate the effects of management activities on the wildlife resource.</p>

Monitoring Plan

Items Monitored		Intent	Monitoring Method/Unit of Measure	Measuring Frequency	Percent Accuracy/Precision	Variability that would reinitiate re-evaluation
<p>WILDLIFE 2</p> <p>a) Population and habitat trends of management indicator species.</p> <p>The following Management Indicator Species (MIS) and Vegetation types associated with each species will be monitored:</p>		Evaluate relationships of effects of Forest Management activities to habitat changes and MIS populations.	<p>May include, but not limited to the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breeding Bird Surveys • Geo-Marine Mexican Spotted Owl monitoring • New Mexico Department of Game and Fish aerial surveys and harvest records • Gila Bird Area Surveys • Research work • Gila trout Recovery Team monitoring • Salmonid depletion monitoring • Count searches • Line searches • Goshawk nest location monitoring 	As required by specific survey protocols.	+/- 20%	Variation in indicator species above those projected would result in re-evaluation. Monitoring as described is tentative and exploratory: modifications may be needed to better indicate the effects of management activities on the wildlife resource.
Mule Deer	Desert Shrub					
Mearns' Quail	Plains Grass/Mtn. Grass					
Plain Titmouse	Pinyon Juniper/Shrub					
Mule Deer	Oakland					
Northern Goshawk	Ponderosa Pine					
Mexican Spotted Owl	Mixed Conifer					
Hairy Woodpecker	Ponderosa Pine and Mixed Conifer Snag Component					
Black Hawk	Low/Mid Riparian					
Beaver						
Native Trout (i.e. Rio Grande and Gila Trout)	High Riparian					
Beaver						
Long-tailed vole	Wet meadows/ wetlands					

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Monitoring Plan

Items Monitored	Intent	Monitoring Method/Unit of Measure	Measuring Frequency	Percent Accuracy/Precision	Variability that would reinitiate re-evaluation
RIPARIAN/AQUATIC Riparian/aquatic condition.	Assure improvement of riparian condition.	<p>Establish baseline data on existing riparian condition during the first decade. Establish 20 aquatic sample stations and complete aquatic/fisheries habitat evaluations. Sample each station during May, June, and July every 5 years, in conjunction with Emlen and riparian condition transects.</p> <p>Establish 20 Emlen survey transects on lower Gila and San Francisco Rivers under 5500 ft. elevation. Establish 15 additional transects in riparian communities above 5500 ft. elevation.</p>	Every five years	+/- 15%; +/- 15%	Sufficient progress is not being made to meet Regional Riparian Condition Goals found in Forestwide Standards and Guidelines.

Decision Notice
& Finding of No Significant Impact

Forest Plan Amendment No.10 for Management Indicator Species

USDA Forest Service
Gila National Forest
Grant, Sierra, Catron and Hidalgo Counties

Decision and Reasons for the Decision

Background

The Gila National Forest Land Management Plan has been in effect since 1986. The Management Indicator Species list identified at that time has become outdated. Many of the species are not good indicators of change due to land management activities, and one has been shown to be another species entirely. There is a need to review this list and reconsider which species are the best candidates as Management Indicator Species with current management emphasis and knowledge about the different species. The environmental assessment (EA) documents the analysis of four alternatives to meet this need.

Decision

Based upon my review of all alternatives, I have decided to implement Alternative 3 which would implement a list of 10 species as indicators of nine vegetation types that are typically found on the Gila National Forest and affected by various management activities. It would also delete those sections of the Forest Plan MIS list that are no longer applicable.

When compared to the other alternatives this alternative will ensure that the Management Indicator Species analyzed in future site specific activities are appropriate indicators for the vegetation types being affected, are current with science, and are likely to show some connection between habitat changes and populations. Several references and species experts were consulted in developing the alternatives and they are referenced in the EA. This alternative provides the best mix-of species that are likely to provide information that can be analyzed to assist in determining the effects of various management activities. This alternative meets requirements under the 2005 Planning Rule transition language found in 36 CFR 219.

Other Alternatives Considered

In addition to the selected alternative, I considered 3 other alternatives. A comparison of these alternatives can be found in the EA on pages 13-14.

Alternative 1 (no action) would have retained the current MIS list and monitoring requirements. I did not select this alternative because it would not have met the purpose and need. The MIS list monitored on the Forest would continue to have species that have been reclassified or that have

shown little or no ability to provide information that would assist in determining the effects of various management activities.

Alternative 2 (proposed action) would have provided for a similar list of MIS species, vegetation and monitoring requirements as Alternative 3 (selected alternative) with the exception of two species. The Northern Goshawk and Mearns's Quail ranked better than the Abert's Squirrel and the Horned Lark, respectively, for their associated vegetation types.

Alternative 4 was not analyzed in detail due to the many species considered that did not meet criteria for selection as MIS.

Alternative 1

No Action

Under the No Action alternative, the current management plan would continue to guide analysis of MIS. The current list of 26 species would be considered in all site specific projects and analyzed, as appropriate. It would continue to require species that are reclassified or have been shown to have little value as MIS to be monitored and analyzed in each site specific project.

Alternative 2

Alternative 2 is similar to Alternative 3. The primary difference is that instead of Northern Goshawk as an MIS for Mixed Conifer vegetation types, Abert's Squirrel is included and instead of Mearns's Quail as an indicator Plains grass/Mtn. grassland vegetation types, the Horned Lark is included. The Northern Goshawk was compared to the Abert's Squirrel (EA pg.) and ranked higher according the criteria used. It is very closely associated ponderosa pine, as is the Abert's squirrel, however, its populations do not appear to be quite as susceptible to change due to factors other than management activities. The Mearns's Quail was compared to the Horned Lark and also ranked higher as a potential MIS in Plains grass and Mtn. grassland. Mearns's Quail is closely associated with the habitat type and is better at showing an upward trend in habitat conditions. The Horned Lark shows downward trend in grassland habitats as its population increases.

Alternative 4

Alternative 4 would have considered all species suggested during scoping and from the current MIS list for inclusion in the MIS list. Many of these species were not considered appropriate as MIS based on criteria developed to analyze the species considered. This alternative was not analyzed in detail as it would have included many species that are inappropriate as MIS due to their rarity, factors apart from management activities that have strong influences on populations, species not found on the Gila National Forest, or species that did not fit the criteria for MIS as well as others associated with the same vegetation types.

Public Involvement

As described in the background, the need for this action arose in 2002. A proposal to amend the Forest Plan for Management Indicator Species was listed in the Schedule of Proposed Actions on July 1, 2004. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping July 13, 2006 and was mailed to 97 individuals and organizations. In addition, as part of the public involvement process, the agency provided an opportunity to comment on the draft EA

on August 29, 2006. Comments were requested by September 15, 2006. The eight individuals or organizations that responded during scoping were mailed copies of the draft EA. Three of those responded.

Using the comments from the public and other agencies (see *Issues* section), the interdisciplinary team identified one issue regarding the effects of the proposed action. The main issue of concern was regarding which species(s) should be included in the Management Indicator Species list (see EA page 9). To address these concerns, the Forest Service created Alternatives 3 and 4 described above.

Finding of No Significant Impact

After considering the environmental effects described in the EA, I have determined that these actions will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment considering the context and intensity of impacts (40 CFR 1508.27). Thus, an environmental impact statement will not be prepared. I based my finding on the following:

1. My finding of no significant environmental effects is not biased by the beneficial effects of the action.

There are no significant environmental effects as there are no effects to any on the ground resources. This amendment simply refines the Management Indicator Species (MIS) that will be used to monitor Forest management activities to determine if those activities are having an effect on various vegetation types and the many species dependent on them. All site specific projects in the future will continue to be analyzed for effects to Management Indicator Species. The alternative selected (Alternative 3), requires ten (10) MIS to be monitored in ten (10) vegetation types. The monitoring of the species identified and the vegetation types they are associated with should yield information that will be useful in determining the effects of management activities on habitats.

2. There will be no significant effects on public health and safety, because there are no physical activities that will affect public health and safety. Additionally, no vegetation types that were previously being monitored will be dropped. Species being monitored that are associated with the ten vegetation types were selected because of their ability to indicate changes to the most limited and/or desired seral stages. This assumes that if the most limiting and/or desired seral stages are supporting stable or increasing trends in populations, that other seral stages which would be more prevalent, would also be present and supporting adequate populations of the species dependent on them.
3. There will be no significant effects on unique characteristics of the area, because there will be no physical effects to any resource, including those with unique characteristics.
4. The effects on the quality of the human environment are not likely to be highly controversial. This amendment will help in assessing effects to the human environment through monitoring in an efficient way with Management Indicator Species that are more likely to show changes from management activities. (See No. 2 above)

5. The effects analysis shows the effects are not uncertain, and do not involve unique or unknown risk. Management Indicator Species have been monitored in the past and the selected alternative refines the current species to be monitored. MIS will continue to be analyzed in each site specific project. No vegetation types have been dropped and monitoring will continue to occur throughout the Forest.
6. The action is not likely to establish a precedent for future actions with significant effects, because there are no on the ground activities with this amendment. The vegetation types and seral stages associated with the amended MIS list are those that are most limited and/or desired, i.e., healthy, mature riparian areas; mature ponderosa pine and mixed conifer; healthy, productive grasslands, etc. Monitoring MIS associated with these vegetation types should help to determine if there are changes due to management activities that are either helping to achieve these desired conditions (GNF, pg. 11-12) or contributing to a downward trend in desired conditions. Because monitoring of these species is more likely to result in useful information that can help determine if there are ongoing negative effects to the habitats and vegetation types most limited and/or desired, it is more likely to help in discerning whether there is progress towards the Gila National Forest desired future conditions.
7. The cumulative impacts are not significant. Monitoring for MIS at a seral stage level as is currently required provides little valuable cumulative information about attainment of desired conditions over time. It is expected over time that monitoring those species associated with the most limiting and/or desired seral stages of the various vegetation types should yield results that address whether or not the Forest is meeting its desired future conditions over a larger space and time.
8. The action will have no significant adverse effect on districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, because MIS monitoring is a tool to measure changes in vegetation and habitats due to management activities. Monitoring for these species will have no effect on districts, sites, highways, structure or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Mitigation and design criteria for these types of sites will be identified during site specific analysis. The action will also not cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources. There will be no effect on cultural or historical resources as there will be no activities to affect them. Scientific information that has been gathered to date on MIS will be retained. Though data will be gathered on fewer species for monitoring of MIS, many of the species on the current list will continue to be monitored for other reasons, including conformance with policies and laws such as the Threatened and Endangered Species Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, Clean Water Act, Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act, and Forest Service Sensitive Species policies. There will be no on-the-ground activities that would destroy any significant scientific resources.
9. The action will not adversely affect any endangered or threatened species or its habitat that has been determined to be critical under the Endangered Species act of 1973. As noted above in No. 8, all threatened and endangered species and their critical habitats will continue to be analyzed on site specific projects. No change in the collection of data for these species is anticipated as a result of the implementation of this action. The action

will have no on-the-ground effects that could physically adversely affect these species. Additionally, the current MIS list contains only one species that is Federally listed as a Threatened or Endangered Species: Mexican Spotted Owl. This species was not dropped from the MIS list in this action.

10. The action will not violate Federal, State, and local laws or requirements for the protection of the environment. Applicable laws and regulations were considered in the EA (see EA pg. 9). The action amends the Gila National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan and is consistent with the 2005 Planning Rule transition language in 36 CFR 219.14.

Findings Required by Other Laws and Regulations

This decision to amend the Management Indicator Species list is consistent with the intent of the forest plan's long term goals and objectives listed on pages 11-12 and with the 2005 Planning Rule transition language found in 36 CFR 219.

Administrative Review or Appeal Opportunities

This decision is subject to administrative review (appeal) pursuant to 36 CFR Part 217. The appeal must be filed (regular mail, fax, email, hand-delivery, or express delivery) with the Reviewing Officer at Regional Forester, Reviewing Officer, 333 Broadway SE, Albuquerque, NM 87102; FAX (505) 842-3173. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered appeals are: 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Electronic appeals must be submitted in a format such as an email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), or Word (.doc) to appeals-southwester-regional-office@fs.fed.us. In cases where no identifiable name is attached to an electronic message, a verification of identity will be required. A scanned signature is one way to provide verification.

Appeals, including attachments, must be filed within 45 days from the publication date of this notice in the Silver City Daily Press, the newspaper of record. Attachments received after the 45 day appeal period will not be considered. The publication date in the Silver City Daily Press, newspaper of record, is the exclusive means for calculating the time to file an appeal. Those wishing to appeal this decision should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source.

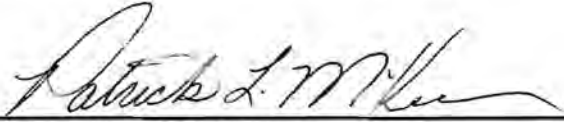
Individuals or organizations who, in writing, have requested it, and to those who are known to have participated in the decision making process specified at 217.5 may appeal this decision. The notice of appeal must meet the appeal content requirements at 36 CFR 217.9.

Implementation of Decision

Implementation shall not occur for 7 calendar days following publication of this legal notice. Requests filed under 217.10 to stay approval of activities included in this Forest Plan amendment shall be considered.

Contact

For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Debby Hyde-Sato, Forest NEPA Coordinator, Gila National Forest, 3005 E. Camino del Bosque, Silver City, NM 88061. (505) 388-8483.



MARCIA R ANDRE

for Forest Supervisor
Gila National Forest

9/19/2006
Date

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