

Questions and answers

For the Shoshone National Forest Draft Land Management Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement

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 for the national 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 a national forest.

Why revise the forest plan?

The National Forest Management Act requires that all forest plans be revised every 10 to 15 years.

The Shoshone's original forest plan, still in effect, was approved in 1986. A lot has changed in 26 years: recreation uses, vegetation conditions, and federal funding, to name just a few.

What documents are available for review? Where can I get them?

These documents are available:

- *Draft Land Management Plan* and appendices (one document)
- *Draft Environmental Impact Statement*
- *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* appendices
- Maps

The *Readers Guide* contains more information about submitting comments and next steps.

There are several ways for you to get copies.

- These documents are available on the Shoshone's website at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/shoshone/home?cid=stelprdb5379153



- Public libraries in Cody, Dubois, Powell, Thermopolis, Riverton, and Lander
- By calling the Supervisor's Office in Cody (307.527.6241) or sending an email to shoshone_forestplan@fs.fed.us
- At Shoshone National Forest offices in Cody, Dubois, and Lander

We strongly encourage you to view the documents electronically. Mailing hard copies is costly, to the taxpayer and the environment (paper, ink, all those mail trucks). If you would like a CD or paper copies of the documents, please let us know.

Why are you using the 1982 planning rule instead of waiting for the 2012 planning rule?

We have been working on forest plan revision since 2005. Since then, the Forest Service revised the planning rule in 2005 and 2008, but subsequent court injunctions prevented the Forest Service from implementing the new rules.

To ensure that years of work and public input would not be lost, the Forest Service agreed to allow national forests to continue revision efforts based on the procedures from the 1982 planning rule, which are still in place under the transition language from the 2000 planning rule.

Although this revision uses 1982 planning procedures, it incorporates many of the best practices found in the new 2012 planning rule, including sustainability, collaboration, best science, and an all-lands approach.

What changes would be made under the preferred alternative?

The preferred alternative is alternative B, described in detail in the *Draft Land Management Plan (Draft Plan)*. Generally, this alternative works to address both traditional issues, such as water quality, and new challenges, such as the ongoing bark beetle epidemic, that have been identified since the 1986 Forest Plan was completed. Alternative B is responsive to changed vegetation conditions due to large fires and insect and disease epidemics occurring on the Shoshone during the last 15 years, while striving to improve biological diversity and wildlife habitat.

Recreation

The *Draft Plan* provides a mix of recreational opportunities within the management areas: motorized and non-motorized opportunities exist across the Shoshone, based on management area allocations. Plan direction focuses on diversifying recreation opportunities while maintaining current uses. Forest Service roads currently open to the public remain open.

Vegetation

The *Draft Plan* emphasizes restoration of vegetation and watersheds to provide increased resistance and resiliency from disturbances, e.g., insects and diseases, wildfire, and potential climate change. The *Draft Plan* also emphasizes the use of prescribed fire and wildfire to help vegetation trend toward desired conditions and reduce hazardous fuels. Timber harvested to restore ecosystems and improve forest health also meets the demand for wood products and provides jobs to local communities.

Special areas

The *Draft Plan* does not recommend additional wilderness areas. It identifies six additional research natural areas and three new special interest areas. It identifies 13 river and stream segments as eligible for recommendation as wild and scenic rivers.

Forest products

Levels of forest products offered for sale under the *Draft Plan* would be greater than what was allowed under the 1986 Forest Plan.

Commercial livestock grazing

Acreage suitable for grazing and the number of animal unit months permitted remain unchanged under the *Draft Plan*.

Minerals

The number of acres available for oil and gas leasing remains unchanged, while the number of acres allowing surface occupancy for development is markedly reduced.

Wildlife habitat management

The *Draft Plan* is updated to include the current lists of threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species, sensitive species, and management indicator species. Big game crucial winter range is managed to reduce disturbance from motorized use. Direction for the protecting grizzly bear and Canada lynx remains in place.

Why did you retain the Northern Rockies lynx Management direction decision that amended the 1986 Forest Plan?

The decision has already gone through public review and U S Fish and Wildlife Service consultation. No new science warrants changing the decision.

Why did you not retain other recent decisions such as the Wildland Fire Use Amendment and the Clarks Fork River Management Plan?

Most of the elements of these recent decisions are carried forward into the *Draft Plan*. We did find a need to make small adjustments to integrate those decisions into new direction; we chose not to retain the direction. Instead, we are redoing the decision in the *Draft Plan*.

Did acres of land suitable for timber production decrease from the 1986 Forest Plan?

Suitable acres increased from 86,300 to 127,000.

Did the allowable sale quantity decrease from the 1986 Forest Plan?

Allowable sale quantity increased to 22,800 Ccf in the *Draft Plan*. The projected future allowable sale quantity for alternative A is 19,800 Ccf.

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

The *Draft Plan* would maintain or enhance wildlife habitats by managing for a diversity of habitat conditions. In addition, it emphasizes cover types such as aspen and whitebark pine that have declined and sagebrush that is at risk of decline. The *Draft Plan* also provides for wildlife habitats by using vegetation treatments and natural fire to create naturally occurring vegetation conditions and patterns on the landscape. 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 their habitat requirements are met. This is achieved through additional direction in the *Draft Plan* in the form of desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines.

How are inventoried roadless areas to be managed?

Current inventoried roadless areas total approximately 684,800 acres. These areas will be managed consistently with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. In the *Draft Plan*, inventoried roadless areas are allocated primarily to management areas within categories 1 and 3 with smaller acreages in categories 2 and 4.

How will the wildland urban interface be managed?

Desired conditions in the *Draft Plan* strive to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface. The desired condition is for a reduced risk of large, stand-replacing wildfires.

How is public access addressed in the Draft Plan?

The *Draft Plan* includes a goal and desired condition to provide motorized and non-motorized access, compatible with desired conditions and objectives for other resources. The miles of National Forest System roads open to the public would not decrease under the *Draft Plan*.

How will the Dunoir Special Management Unit be managed?

The Dunoir Special Management Unit will continue to be managed under the enabling legislation. Mountain bike and winter motorized use will be excluded so that management is consistent with the enabling legislation. This is a change from the 1986 Forest Plan, which did not exclude these uses.

What are the management indicator species in the Draft Plan and why were they chosen?

The *Draft Plan* establishes four management indicator species: ruffed grouse (aspen communities), Brewer's sparrow (sagebrush communities), red-breasted nuthatch (mature conifer forest with snags), and stream trout (streams and riparian habitat). The populations of these species are believed to indicate the effects of management activities in their suitable habitats.

What are species of local concern and why was that category added?

Species of local concern are wildlife, insect, and plant species that have important social values, or are of concern because of their limited distribution/rarity. The *Draft Plan* identifies elk, mule deer, moose, Yellowstone checkerspot (butterfly), Clark's nutcracker, and various rare plant species as species of local concern.

How does the Draft Plan address fire and fuels management?

Wildfire will continue to be a significant influence on the landscape. The *Draft Plan* would contribute to reducing hazardous fuels using vegetation treatments and wildfire. Mechanical and prescribed fire treatments would be targeted specifically in areas where hazardous fuels conditions are a concern. Total hazardous fuel reduction from mechanical and prescribed fire treatments would continue the trend of the last 10 years, treating 35,000 acres in the next 10 to 15 years.

Does the Draft Plan change winter motorized access?

The 1986 Forest Plan generally allowed over-snow motorized vehicle use in management areas allocated to non-motorized recreation, including the Dunoir Special Management Unit (Management Area 1.6B). Only summer motorized use was specifically restricted in these areas. Though current plan allocation allows the use, over-snow motorized vehicle use is not occurring in all acres that are open to that use under the current forest plan. Under the *Draft Plan*, over-snow motorized vehicle recreation would continue to be allowed in areas where it is currently occurring, except within the Dunoir where use is not allowed. In the *Draft Plan*, expansion of use is allowed in management areas suitable for that use. In the *Draft Plan*, over-snow motorized use is allowed within big game crucial winter range where Wyoming Game and Fish indicates that current use levels are not negatively impacting wintering big game.

Are you closing roads?

The *Draft Plan* makes no decisions to close roads. Travel management, a subsequent planning process that will follow plan revision, will determine the desired road network for the Shoshone. In the *Draft Plan*, roads currently open to the public occur within management areas that allow that use to continue.

What does the Draft Plan do about the bark beetle epidemic?

The *Draft Plan* contains direction to manage stands to reduce impacts from bark beetles in actively managed areas of the Shoshone. In these areas, active management can reduce stand susceptibility to bark beetles by reducing stand ages and increasing age class and species diversity. Because of the high number of acres in wilderness and back country areas, there will still be large areas of the Shoshone subject to large scale bark beetle epidemics.

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

A great deal of public involvement and collaboration has occurred since we began plan revision in 2005. Two official Notices of Intent were published in the *Federal Register*. The first, in September 2005, and the second in September 2010. Between 2005 and now, we hosted public meetings, open houses, field trips, and meetings with cooperating agencies. All cooperating agency meetings were open to the public. Seventy-one informational meetings took place in local communities. In addition to public meetings, briefings were held with interested American Indian tribes, congressional representatives, elected officials, interested agencies, and interest groups. The purposes of the meetings were to 1) share information about revision topics, and 2) gather comments and concerns regarding the proposed action.

Due to updated national planning rules and court injunctions halting implementation of the 2005 and 2008 rules, we experienced multiple delays in the revision process. In order to ensure that the many years of public input would continue to be relevant, we are proceeding with completing the planning process following the procedures of the 1982 planning rule. This *Draft Plan* reflects the input of many collaborative meetings and public input.

What happens next?

The 90-day comment period on the *Draft Plan* and *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* begins on August 4, 2012, and ends on November 1, 2012. The comment period provides an opportunity for the public to help shape our revised forest plan. We will review all comments and will respond to substantive comments that warrant a detailed response. Substantive comments:

- Provide factual information, professional opinions, or informed judgment that are relevant to the action proposed;
- Are specific, comparative, or solution oriented; and
- Goes beyond expressing an opinion and gives reasons why the opinion is important.

Through responding to comments, we may modify alternatives, evaluate new alternatives, improve or modify the analysis, and make factual corrections. The final plan will incorporate these changes.

Public meetings to share information about the *Draft Plan* and the *Draft Environmental Impact Statement* will be held the last week of September 2012. All public meetings will be from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at these locations:

- Cody – Monday, September 24, Big Horn Federal, 1701 Stampede Avenue
- Dubois – Tuesday, September 25, Headwaters Art and Convention Center, 17 Stalnaker
- Lander – Wednesday, September 26, Monarch Hall at the Pronghorn Lodge, 150 East Main Street
- Thermopolis – Thursday, September 27, Big Horn Federal, 643 Broadway

The final plan and final environmental impact statement will be published in the summer of 2013. This will be followed by a 60-day objection period. To qualify for standing to object, objections must be linked to a prior substantive comment submitted during opportunities for comment on the proposed decision. Objections will be resolved and/or responded to within 90 days following the 60-day objection period. The record of decision for the revised plan will not be issued until the reviewing officer has responded to the objections.

Where can I learn more?

More information is available on the Shoshone's website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/shoshone/>