

Executive Summary

The FY 2011 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 11 Findings and Recommendations for Change. Based on these findings, a 2012 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 11. Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2011 found that 36.8 percent of the seedlings have survived. First-year survival exams found that 36.3 percent of the seedlings had survived. Seedling survival was affected by the 2011 drought.
- The FSVeg age-class distribution report for the end of 2011 shows a continuing trend towards an older forest.
- In FY 11, the NFGT prescribe burned approximately 79,437 acres. The *Plan* set an annual objective of approximately 100,000 acres of prescribed burning. Fewer acres were burned because the 2011 drought made conditions unsuitable for conducting prescribe burning after April 2011.
- 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 401 active clusters, a new milestone for the NFGT.
- Habitat for MIS (Management Indicator Species) is improving throughout the forests and grasslands. Prescribed fire efforts are showing greater improvements in both the number of certain element occurrences and quality of each occurrence for fire-dependent plant species.
- 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 11. 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. These surveys focused on primary vectors for infestations such as utility right-of-ways, special use sites, recreation sites, and road right-of-ways. Species such as Japanese climbing fern and Chinese tallow tree continue to be reported in these areas on the Forest.
- The 2011 drought had an impact on forest vegetation. There is a need to assess how native and non-native vegetation survived the drought. There is also a need to assess how tree mortality impacted habitat for the Forest's Threatened, Endangered and Sensitive (TES) Species such as the Red-cockaded Woodpecker (RCW).

Sub-Issue 3. Watershed Conditions

- Soil and water disturbances were identified that exceeded the soil loss tolerance levels set out in the *Plan*. The following issues were identified: culverts down-cutting streams on one National Forest and storm water discharge onto another National Forest from private land. Corrective actions were identified and reported to the appropriate District Ranger.
- The Forest fisheries biologist recorded elevated conductivity levels in Turkey Creek on the Angelina National Forest. It was determined that the source of this pollutant was fertilizer from a commercial timber plantation on private land.
- 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. Two priority watersheds were selected by the Forest Leadership Team: Sixmile Creek on the Sabine National Forest and Parker Creek-Angelina River on the Angelina National Forest. Watershed assessments are available on the U.S. Forest Service website at the following web address: <http://www.fs.fed.us/publications/watershed/>.

Issue B. Sustainable Multiple Forest and Range Benefits

Sub-Issue 1. Outdoor Recreation Opportunities

- The NFGT is exploring other options for maintaining its recreation facilities including utilizing partnerships and volunteers. Services, or season of operation, may need to be reduced at some areas. Input from the public would be needed.
- Move toward implementing Scenery Management System (SMS). Implementation of SMS would be addressed in the next Forest Plan revision.
- During FY 11 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 11 was in compliance with contract specifications and the *Plan's* Standards and Guidelines.
- A total of 49.01 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.
- The new Forest Supervisor's office in Lufkin was completed in early 2011 after several years of construction. Employees occupied the building in May 2011.
- Continue monitoring and request increased funding allocations to address boundary maintenance needs as well as how tree mortality from the 2011 drought impacted NFGT landlines.

Sub-Issue 3. Human Influences

- There is a constant rise in use of NFGT lands that are near large urban areas. This has also increased the creation of unauthorized trails and other resource damage to the forests.
- Law enforcement agents are still encountering controlled substance use activity on the NFGT.
- Inspections in FY 11 indicated that land use authorizations were in compliance with the terms of authorization.

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

- In FY 10, Regional Forester Liz Agpaoa signed a decision to allow prescribed burning for fuel reduction in Upland Island Wilderness on the Angelina National Forest. Due to the exceptional drought conditions in 2011, no burning was completed in Upland Island Wilderness. Prescribed burns are planned for FY 2012.
- The NFGT will provide a link on its website allowing visitors to submit comments about their wilderness experience directly to wilderness/recreation managers. This would be another option for commenting in addition to the Wildergram card.

Sub-Issue 5. Timber

- For the last seven years, an average of 20.0 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.
- Project plans, prescriptions, environmental assessments and decision documents that were developed in FY 11 were reviewed and found to be in compliance with the *Plan*.
- Third-year stocking exams conducted in 2011 found that 50.0 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 stands.
- Cutting units in FY 11 conformed to the maximum size limits established in the *Plan*.
- 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 11, 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 11 indicated activities were in compliance with the permit conditions and operating plans.
- There was 1 reported oil spill on the Sam Houston National Forest. On November 21, 2010, approximately 30 barrels of sweet crude leaked from Sunoco's pipeline near Huntsville, Texas. All the contaminated soil was removed from the site. The site was completely remediated within 2-3 days.

Sub-Issue 8. Heritage Resources

- In FY 11, 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 11, the NFGT's expenditures were \$17,649,320 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 several issues affecting the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas.

a. National Forest System Litigation Affecting the NFGT

- ***2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule*** – Due to ongoing litigation in other states, on May 30, 2011, Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack renewed his reservation of final decision authority over certain forest management and road construction projects in inventoried roadless areas. The Secretary's Memorandum 1042-156 affected only the process by which such activities are authorized. It did not alter or prescribe any substantive standards for the management of such areas. Any project authorized through the process established by the Secretary's Memorandum was to comply with all applicable laws, including, but not limited to, the National Environmental Policy Act. The Secretary wanted to assure the careful evaluation of actions in inventoried roadless areas while long term roadless policy is developed and relevant court cases move forward.

Additionally, the Secretary's May 30, 2011, re-delegation provided for personal free use decisions under Title 36, Code of Federal Regulations, Section 223.10 to Alaskan

settlers, miners, residents, and prospectors. Direction given stated that these free use authorizations should only be issued in inventoried roadless areas when needs could not be met in the roaded land base on the Chugach and Tongass National Forests. When personal use timber is collected from inventoried roadless areas, it should be done in a way that maximizes the protection of roadless character, wildlife habitat, recreation, and other values associated with roadless areas.

The Sam Houston National Forest has four areas that are being managed per this Roadless Rule direction. These areas are: Big Creek Scenic Area, Winters Bayou Scenic Area, a 200-acre track adjacent to Little Lake Creek Wilderness, and the Big Woods Areas in Compartment 80.

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.

- ***Sierra Club, et al v. Jacobs, et al*** – Details about this lawsuit have been provided in prior monitoring reports since the lawsuit was filed in 2004. However, the 2009 report inadvertently left out information that an agreement between the parties was reached and filed with the Fifth Circuit Court and both appeals were dismissed on May 29, 2009. Afterwards, the U.S. District Court in Houston, Texas vacated its judgment (which barred the implementation of two enjoined projects) on July 13, 2009 and the case at that level was dismissed.

Since the case was dismissed, the U.S. Forest Service has proceeded with implementation of its projects by following the guidelines in the settlement agreement and in collaboration with the Sierra Club.

b. Changes in Policy or Other Direction

National Forest System Land and Resources Management Planning Rule – The proposed Planning Rule and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) were published on February 14, 2011. These were the outcome of an open and transparent development process and the Forest Service went to extraordinary lengths, reaching well beyond normal practices, to help the public understand and comment including:

- Hosting 29 national and regional public forums to provide stakeholders with information about the proposed Rule and respond to questions;
- Providing a 90-day comment period, which was 45 days more than the review and comment period required by National Environmental Policy Act regulations for DEISs;
- Providing multiple options for members of the public to submit comments including two websites, by hard copy mail, and by facsimile; and
- Ensuring that the Planning Rule website contains background information on the proposed rule as well as summaries of the various collaboration and public involvement activities held during the preparation of the proposed Rule.

Nearly 300,000 comments were received on the proposed Rule and DEIS during the 90-day comment period which closed May 16, 2011. Comments were received from a wide range of individuals, groups and organizations as well as state, county, Tribal and federal governments. The Forest Service reviewed and analyzed these comments to help develop the preferred alternative. Comments submitted on the proposed Rule and DEIS can be viewed at <http://contentanalysisgroup.com/fsr/>.

The agency’s goal is to issue a final Planning Rule during FY 2012.

c. Effects of National Forest Management to and from Private Lands

Wildland-Urban Interface

- In FY 11, the NFGT conducted numerous prescribed fires that, among other benefits, reduced the potential of wildfire spread. In FY 12, the NFGT will continue its prescribe fire program and increase efforts to mechanically treat strips of land along federal property boundaries to help mitigate the potential for the spread of wildfire.

Payments to Counties

- In FY 11, the NFGT made payments to counties in Texas that contain NFGT lands through Title I of the Secure Rural Schools Act. **Table 1** displays the amounts that were paid by the U.S. Treasury to the involved counties.

Table 1. Payments to Counties in 2011

Counties	Payments
Angelina	\$115,294
Houston	\$442,393
Jasper	\$58,145
Montgomery	\$67,390
Nacogdoches	\$33,060
Newton	\$11,276
Sabine	\$320,503
San Augustine	\$224,620
San Jacinto	\$151,529
Shelby	\$284,684
Trinity	\$337,798
Walker	\$214,457
Total	\$2,261,482

- Title II funds from the Secure Rural Schools Act (SRS) can be used for special projects on federal lands. These projects are developed with the assistance of a Resource Advisory Committee (RAC). The Davy Crockett National Forest (DCNF) and the Angelina/Sabine National Forest (ASNF) have partnered with the local county officials to develop a RAC. Projects developed by the RAC include watershed restoration and maintenance, infrastructure maintenance, treatment of non-native invasive plant species, and the improvement of wildlife habitat.

d. Community Outreach

- Because the population of Texas is becoming more urban and diverse, the NFGT is working to reconnect Forest visitors with their National Forests. Programs like the Children’s Forest Initiative and Citizen Scientist got people young and old involved in the National Forests.
- Conservation Education. “El Bosque de los Niños en Texas”, will use existing partnerships to develop and enhance a network of locations and delivery methods in Texas. While anchored to specific locations, The Children’s Forest in Texas (CFT) will also incorporate a mobile and virtual presence. Program development will be guided by current U.S. Forest Service and partner initiatives. Programs will incorporate science-based education, on-site service learning, health awareness, career and leadership development, mentor training and community conservation education. The CFT will be managed by the Friends of the National Forests and Grasslands of Texas - Latino Legacy-Amigos del Bosque program, a non-profit conservation education and forest restoration program.
- Citizen Scientists. In 2011, The NFGT formed a partnership with the Ladybird Johnson Wildflower Center to educate citizen scientists about invasive species and rare plants. The objective was to teach interested individuals so that they could help the USFS monitor for invasive species and rare plant species. Workshops were held on the Davy Crockett, Angelina and Sabine National Forests.