

Forest supervisor upbeat about planning summit

By ERIC BARKER of the Tribune | Posted: Tuesday, October 30, 2012 12:00 am

Officials on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest say their forest plan revision summit held in Orofino was a success but many more meetings and hard work is yet to come.

Dozens of people attended the three-day event at the River's Edge Hotel in Orofino this past weekend and began the collaborative process that is expected to take six to nine months.

"It was a great meeting," said Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell. "There was a great attitude of wanting to help. I was so impressed with the energy in the room. Folks were getting along with people sitting across the table with them with different interests than their own and having good conversations."

The forest was chosen to be among the first in the nation to update its guiding plan under a new set of rules that emphasize members of the public meeting collaboratively to help shape the process. The individual plans for the Clearwater and Nez Perce forests have not been updated since 1987. The new process will come up with one plan to match the ongoing combination of the two forests into one management unit.

"We really have to pull it all together under one umbrella," Brazell said.

Forest plans serve as guiding documents that are sometimes described as zoning rules that spell out what sorts of activities can occur on different areas of the forest. For example, some places might be identified as potential wilderness areas while other places are slated for timber or grazing.

"It's land allocation, how we allocate certain parts of the forest for different uses," Brazell said.

Carol Hennessey, collaboration manager for the revision process, said most people recognize that national forests are places that allow multiple uses, but that doesn't mean every activity can happen everywhere.

"A lot of uses are not compatible together, so what the plan does is look at the suitability of the uses and it also looks at desired future conditions: What do you want the forest to look like for your children and grandchildren in the next 20 years and what does a sustainable forest look like?"

Over the weekend about 50 people signed on to try to answer those sorts of questions. They will meet at least on a monthly basis through the spring and eventually organize themselves into more specialized subgroups.

"Everybody wants to meet together for awhile and not have subgroups," Hennessey said.

However, some participants from places like Boise and Lolo, Mont., may form into geographic subgroups, and the forest is working on a process that will allow people from almost anywhere to participate online. The revision effort is also structured to allow new people to join the group at any time.

Brazell said he hopes the collaborative portion of the revision can wrap up by summer. When it does, the agency will start to craft the ideas into a draft document and perform the necessary environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act. The entire process is expected to take two to three years.

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