

FLATHEAD NATIONAL FOREST PLAN REVISION - AUGUST 2013

The Flathead National Forest is beginning the first phase of a multi-year planning process to revise the Forest Plan. The intent of the planning framework is to create a responsive planning process that informs integrated resources management and allows the Forest Service to adapt to changing conditions, including climate change, and improve management based on new information and monitoring. The FNF planning process will consist of the following three phases:

- 1. Assessment.** The assessment rapidly evaluates existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability and their relationship to the land management plan within the context of the broader landscape.
- 2. Revision.** The plan revision will be based on the identification of the need to change from the assessment. The plan revision will include development of a proposed plan, consideration of the environmental effects of the proposal, providing an opportunity to comment on the proposed plan, providing an opportunity to object before the proposal is approved, and, finally, approval of the plan revision.
- 3. Monitoring.** Monitoring is continuous and provides feedback for the planning cycle by testing relevant assumptions, tracking relevant conditions over time, and measuring management effectiveness.

ASSESSMENT

The Flathead National Forest is working on phase I – the assessment. The assessment is not a decision making document but provides current information on select topics relevant to the plan area. The assessment contributes to the planning process by:

- Developing plan components including desired conditions, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitability of lands.
- Identifying and evaluating a solid base of existing information relevant to the plan revision.
- Building a common understanding of that information with the public and other interested parties before starting plan revision.
- Developing relationships with interested parties, government entities, tribes, private landowners, and other partners.
- Develops an understanding of the complex topics across landscapes that are relevant to planning on the forest.

In the assessment for plan development or revision, the responsible official shall identify and evaluate existing information relevant to the plan area for the following:

1. Terrestrial ecosystems, aquatic ecosystems, and watersheds
2. Air, soil, and water resources and quality
3. System drivers, including dominant ecological processes, disturbance regimes, and stressors, such as natural succession, wildland fire, invasive species, and climate change; and the ability of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems on the plan area to adapt to change
4. Baseline assessment of carbon stocks
5. Threatened, endangered, proposed and candidate species, and potential species of conservation concern present in the plan area
6. Social, cultural, and economic conditions
7. Benefits people obtain from the planning area (ecosystem services)
8. Multiple uses and their contributions to local, regional, and national economies
9. Recreation settings, opportunities and access, and scenic character
10. Renewable and nonrenewable energy and mineral resources
11. Infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors
12. Areas of tribal importance
13. Cultural and historical resources and uses
14. Land status and ownership, use, and access patterns; and
15. Existing designated areas located in the plan area including wilderness and wild and scenic rivers and potential need and opportunity for additional designated areas.

MULTIPLE USES AND ECOSYSTEM SERVICES

The assessment will identify and evaluate existing information relevant to multiple uses and the benefits that people obtain (ecosystem services) from the Flathead National Forest. The following information provides definitions and expected topics that will be addressed in these sections of the assessment.

MULTIPLE USES-The management of all the various renewable surface resources of the National Forest System so that they are utilized in the combination that will best meet the needs of the American people; making the most judicious use of the land for some or all of these resources or related services over areas large enough to provide sufficient latitude for periodic adjustments in use to conform to changing needs and conditions; that some lands will be used for less than all of the resources; and harmonious and coordinated management of the various resources, each with the other, without impairment of the productivity of the land, with consideration being given to the relative values of the various resources, and not necessarily the combination of uses that will give the greatest dollar return or the greatest unit output. The following multiple uses and their trends will be discussed in the assessment.

- Outdoor recreation
- Scenery
- Range
- Timber
- Watershed
- Fish and wildlife
- Energy and Minerals

ECOSYSTEM SERVICES- Benefits people obtain from ecosystems, including:

1. Provisioning services, such as clean air and fresh water, energy, food, fuel, forage, wood products or fiber, and minerals;
2. Regulating services, such as long term storage of carbon; climate regulation; water filtration, purification and storage; soil stabilization; flood and drought control; and disease regulation;
3. Supporting service, such as pollination, seed dispersal, soil formation, and nutrient cycling; and
4. Cultural services, such as educational, aesthetic, spiritual, and cultural heritage values, recreational experiences, and tourism opportunities.

In addition to the multiple use resource topics that are listed above, the Flathead NF has identified the following key ecosystem services that will be addressed in the assessment:

- Forest products (huckleberries, wood products: timber, fiber, post and pole, firewood, Christmas trees/boughs)
- Water (water quality: clean drinking water)
- Air (clean air)
- Wildlife and Fish (non-consumptive: full complement of native species—addressed by ecosystem integrity, consumptive will be addressed under multiple use)
- Inspiration and non-use values (spiritual, solitude)
- Cultural services (cultural heritage, research and education)
- Regulating Services (flood control, climate regulation/carbon sequestration)