



Flathead National Forest Plan Revision Stakeholder Collaboration Draft Operating Procedures

September 19, 2013

General Ground Rules

Stakeholder collaboration is most successful when there is mutual respect that encourages constructive and creative input. For that reason, the following general ground rules are proposed:

- Respect one another's ideas: Recognize that, even if we do not agree, each of us is entitled to our own perspective.
- Listen constructively and respectfully: Sincerely try to understand other stakeholder's needs and interests.
- Look for ways to work towards mutually beneficial outcomes.

Meeting Conduct and Procedures

- Be timely and be ready to start when breaks are over.
- Participate in only one conversation at once (unless subgroups are working concurrently).
- Focus critiques on issues, not people.
- Support everyone's right to be heard: respect time by not "hogging the floor" and do not interrupt others.
- All meeting summaries, informational materials, and reports will be made publicly available.

Decision-Making

The purpose of stakeholder collaboration in the FNF Plan Revision is to provide **recommendations** for the FNF regarding management direction. The process will promote deliberations that are thoughtful and frank and include a diversity of perspectives and interests. All input and stakeholder recommendations will be taken into consideration; however, ultimately, **the FNF maintains decision-making power.**



Stakeholder deliberations will focus on achieving as much consensus as possible. Consensus is defined as being able to “live with” a recommendation going forward. In situations where consensus is not achievable, differing perspectives and the reasoning behind contrasting opinions, as well as the degree to which there is or isn’t agreement, will be documented carefully. Meeting participants will have the opportunity to review meeting summaries and documents before they are deemed “final” to ensure that their own perspectives are accurately reflected. Voting will not be used, except perhaps on a limited basis to take “straw poll” sense of the group as an issue is being discussed.

The collaboration **will focus on the forest-level**, not the project level. In other words, **site-specific decisions are not expected to be made through the forest plan revision process.**

Stakeholder collaboration is not intended to supplant the public engagement and comment that occurs through the NEPA process.

FNF and Meridian Institute Roles

US Forest Service – Flathead National Forest: The FNF will provide information about the forest planning process and timelines, offer guidance about the legal or other “sideboards” that would bound the discussions, and provide technical information to help support the deliberations.

Meridian Institute: Meridian Institute’s role is as a neutral third party, responsible for facilitating the design of the collaboration process and planning, organizing, facilitating and documenting meetings. In addition, Meridian will oversee the online E-collaboration component of the process and be readily accessible to stakeholders who have questions, special needs and requests for information, etc. The integrity of the process depends on Meridian maintaining extraordinarily high standards of transparency, inclusiveness, and respect for all perspectives.

Process Components

Process Advisory Group: The process advisory group will provide advice to Meridian Institute about the design and conduct of the collaboration process, e.g., on topics such as: meeting frequency, ground rules, community outreach, and e-collaboration. The role of the group is to provide advice about the process, not to make substantive recommendations. The group is expected to be comprised of up to 10 individuals with an interest in the collaboration process, from a variety of perspectives, willing to dedicate 2-4 hours per month for a monthly conference



call and email correspondence. Ultimately, advisory group participants will be self-selected on a volunteer basis but Meridian may actively recruit members to achieve diversity.

Inter-Agency Group: The Interagency Group will be comprised of representatives from Federal, State, Local and Tribal Agencies with resource and land management authorities and responsibilities that intersect with those of the FNF. Group members will meet a minimum of three times during the collaboration process: early on for initial input, mid-way for a check-in on progress, and at the end to hear and comment on a summary of results and next steps. Members will have the opportunity to participate virtually through webinar and/or conference call.

Topical Work Groups: At this time we anticipate four topical work groups, one for each of the subjects that were the focus of the field trips conducted in August and September:

- Forest vegetation and disturbances including fire, timber harvest and forest products
- Recreation settings opportunities and access, and scenic character
- Terrestrial and aquatic habitats and threatened and endangered species and species of conservation concern, and invasive species
- IRA, recommended wilderness, and wild and scenic rivers

The work group meetings will be open to anyone, and meeting summaries and recommendations will be posted for public review and comment. However, we will be seeking a core group of participants for each work group for purposes of maintaining some consistency and continuity to the deliberations. Stakeholders can participate in multiple groups if they so choose. The groups will meet in-person approximately monthly, with facilitation provided by the Meridian Institute. Additional conference calls and electronic correspondence may be requested between in-person meetings. There will be periodic plenaries that bring all the work groups together so the members can coordinate across topics and comment on each other's work. All meetings will be open to the public, and individuals (members and the general public) will have the option to participate virtually through webinar and/or conference call.

Guidelines for E-Collaboration and Public Comments

Multiple methods of online communication (e-collaboration) will be offered to enable involvement by stakeholders who may not be able to participate directly in meetings, with the same high expectations for mutual respect. Inappropriate comments (e.g., abusive or foul language, personal attacks, discriminatory speech, unrelated material, and spam, including solicitations and/or advertising) will be promptly deleted.