

Public Participation Strategy

The Carson National Forest is revising its Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) in accordance with the 2012 Planning Rule. In revising its forest plan, the Carson National Forest is committed to increased public participation and collaboration throughout the planning process. Public participation processes and opportunities should be:

- Transparent to clearly communicate the types of feedback required from the public, when it is required, and how it will be used.
- Accessible to interested and potentially affected parties so as to engage people with diverse skills sets and knowledge who can best inform the planning process.
- Structured to elicit specific feedback and data at designated points in the plan revision process.
- Able to promote problem solving and creative solutions, as well as constructive dialogue, debate, and deliberation.
- Efficient and practical for Forest Service personnel and the public.

Purpose

The intent of meaningful and proactive public participation throughout the entire planning process is to:

- Build and maintain working relationships, trust, capacity, and commitment to the plan.
- Allow for shared learning and understanding between and among the Forest Service and public participants.
- Promote a common understanding of the context for planning and the planning process.
- Encourage public feedback through the planning process.
- Support development of plans through an inclusive, transparent process that increases the integrity of the forest plan and adds clarity to the decisionmaking process and the rationale for decisions.

How Do We Engage Public Participation?

The extent of public participation varies by stage of planning and unit-specific conditions, as well as the scope and scale of the planning effort. In taking into consideration cost, time, and available staffing, the responsible official should strive to find the right balance of engaging the public and developing a planning process that is timely and within the fiscal capability of the local unit. Public engagement and participation methods utilized throughout the planning process should include informing, consulting, involving, and utilizing collaboration processes.

Informing – Sufficient objective information provided to interested parties to understand intended actions, processes, and preliminary issues. Potential tools: fact sheet, newsletter, mailing, news release, and website.

Consulting – Interested parties are solicited for input about suggestions, issues, and concerns while continuing to be informed and updated. Potential tools: open house, public meetings, notice and comment, news release, website, survey.

Involving – Work closely with interested parties to address concerns and suggestions and provide feedback about how input is being considered. Potential tools: workshops, partnerships, and public meetings.

Collaborating – Directly engage parties to exchange information and work together on one or more issues at a given stage in the process. Identify where there is agreement and disagreement. Potential tools: Facilitated or mediated group discussion, Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) groups, non-FACA groups and partnerships.

Collaboration During the Planning Process

Collaboration is one of several public involvement tools utilized during the planning process. The use of the collaboration process should be considered at critical points in the planning process or for issues that may be controversial.

Collaboration methods should be within the capacity and fiscal capability of the planning unit and the public. The use of external partners to lead collaborative groups will be considered by the Forest Service for formal collaborative processes. The development of a framework or set of ground rules will be utilized to help sustain collaborative efforts. Such a framework should be developed collaboratively and include:

- A statement of the issue at hand;
- Defined collaborative parameters in keeping with Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) and responsible official’s legal responsibilities;
- A description of how often the parties will meet;
- A description of how the parties will communicate with each other outside of meetings; and
- Mutually agreed upon ground rules including common goals, shared values, realistic expectations, a decision making process, and clear roles and responsibilities.

In designing a collaborative planning process, the forest should:

- Explore potential interested and affected parties with whom the agency could collaborate.
- Determine the extent to which they are willing to involve different parties during each phase of the planning process, and avoid creating expectations that cannot be fulfilled.
- Where another form of public participation is more appropriate, determine whether and how to engage parties at the “inform,” “consult,” or “involve” levels of engagement.

Decision-making

While the Agency is committed to public participation and encourages collaboration, the forest supervisor is the responsible official and is accountable for all formal land management planning decisions affecting NFS lands (16 U.S.C. 1604, 36 CFR part 219) and may not relinquish that responsibility. The forest supervisor may consider the common ground agreements and recommendations of relevant collaborators, but need not accept the recommendations in making a decision.

Stakeholder Interest Groups

Throughout the planning process the Forest Service will strive to identify and engage a diverse set of stakeholders who have an interest in or who are affected by the management of the Carson National Forest. Outreach should be appropriate for target populations and should include:

- Interested individuals and entities at the local, regional, and national level;
- Youth, low-income, and minority populations;
- Private landowners adjacent to or who are affected by management actions;
- Federal agencies, states, counties, and local governments, as well as relevant state agencies; and
- Interested or affected federally recognized tribes.

When Should We Engage Public Participation?

The 2012 Planning Rule requires public participation at specific stages in the planning process.

- During the assessment phase;
- When developing a plan proposal;
- When providing an opportunity to comment on a draft proposal and accompanying NEPA documents;
- At the beginning of the objection period for a new plan, amendment, or revision
- To approve the final plan; and
- In reviewing the results of monitoring information

Assessment Phase - The intent of public participation in the assessment phase is to gather as much relevant information as possible to inform the plan development process. Participation offers opportunities to share concerns about existing conditions and trends and perceptions of risks to social, economic, and ecological systems. Public participation in the assessment phase also supports the development of relationships with and among stakeholders and can begin to develop a joint understanding of current conditions and available data, and it offers an opportunity for feedback to support a strategic, efficient planning process.

Plan Revision Phase - The intent of public participation during plan development, revision, or amendment is to develop and identify zones of agreement relevant to plan components, where possible, acquire assistance in designing effective plan components, and obtain other feedback as needed. Topics that may be included in public participation include potential desired conditions, objectives, other plan components, and other plan content.

Monitoring Phase - The intent of public participation in this phase is to develop effective questions and indicators and the appropriate scale for each, identify key assumptions, identify where the monitoring program could build from existing efforts, identify where multi-party monitoring is possible or desired, and establish public support for monitoring questions and indicators. For broader-scale monitoring, public participation can support the development of strategies that are best addressed at a larger geographic scale. Consider growing the capacity of participants and partners to contribute to the monitoring program in meaningful ways, including opportunities for multi-party monitoring.

Public Participation and Outreach Opportunities

During the Assessment Phase:

At start of phase utilize website and public forums to engage and inform interested and affected local communities, landowners, local and county governments, youths and minorities about the planning processes and solicit feedback on the local knowledge of the forest landscape including how and to what extent the public uses and/or is affected by the Carson NF.

Conduct public listening sessions and workshops to learn how and when the public wishes to engage and participate in the planning process.

Engage people with diverse skill sets and knowledge for feedback on the development of key ecosystem characteristics, potential list of species of conservation concern, and when planning unit contributions to social economic sustainability have been identified.

Initiate tribal consultation with interested and affected tribes early and throughout the planning process.

During the Development of Plan Proposal:

Utilizing the information learned from the listening sessions with collaborative partners and stakeholders during the assessment phase potential individual or collective opportunities for public engagement and participation could include:

- As the preliminary need for change is developed.
- To provide feedback on the best available scientific information (BASI) used in plan development.

- To provide feedback on potential desired conditions, objectives, plan components, and other plan content.
- To propose or provide feedback on priority watersheds.
- To suggest or provide feedback on the planning unit’s distinctive roles and contributions.

During development and implementation of the monitoring program, including:

To develop the plan monitoring program - This occurs during plan development. Opportunities may invite feedback on questions and indicators and may request design strategies that allow for multi-party monitoring or build on existing data sets.

In reviewing the results of monitoring information - The monitoring evaluation report must be made available. Public participation could be invited to:

- Help develop the report.
- Gather feedback on the monitoring evaluation results.
- Support the process of adaptive management.