

Questions and Answers

For the Shoshone National Forest Revised Land Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, and draft Record of Decision

What is a forest plan?

A forest plan is an overall guide for what happens on a national forest. It is based on science, law, and input from citizens. Essentially, a forest plan establishes goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines for the national forest. The goals, desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines are used to steer future management decisions and set consistent expectations for the types of activities permissible on a national forest.

Why revise a forest plan?

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires that each Forest's land and resource management plan (Forest Plan) be revised every 10 to 15 years. The Shoshone's original Forest Plan, still in effect, was approved in 1986. However, the need for this revision was critical because much has changed in 27 years: recreational uses, vegetation conditions, wildlife populations, and economic conditions, to name just a few. The Forest Plan is being revised in accordance with NFMA to address these additional changes that have occurred in and around the Shoshone National Forest.

What documents are available for review? Where can I get them?

These documents are available:

- Revised Land Management Plan and appendices (One document)
- Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume I, Chapters 1-4
- Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume II, Appendix A
- Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume III, Appendices B-H
- Draft Record of Decision
- Maps
- Cover Letter from the Forest Supervisor to the Reader

There are several ways for you to get copies:

- These documents are available on the Shoshone's website at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/shoshone/home/?cid=stelprdb5379153



- Public libraries in Cody, Dubois, Powell, Thermopolis, Riverton, and Lander

- By calling the Supervisor’s Office in Cody (307.527.6241) or sending an email to Shoshone_forestplan@fs.fed.us
- At Shoshone National Forest offices in Cody, Dubois, and Lander.

We strongly encourage you to view these documents electronically. Mailing hard copies is costly to the taxpayer and the environmental footprint is large (paper, ink, mail delivery emissions). However, if you would like a CD please let us know.

Why are we using the 1982 planning rule instead of waiting for the 2012 planning rule?

The Shoshone National Forest has been working on plan revision since 2005. Since then, the Forest Service revised the planning rule in 2005 and 2008, but subsequent court decisions prevented the Forest Service from implementing the new rules.

To ensure that years of work and public input would not be lost, the Forest Service agreed to allow national forests to continue revision efforts based on the procedures from the 1982 rule, which are still in place under the transition language from the 2000 planning rule.

Although this revision uses 1982 planning procedures, it incorporates many of the best practices found in the new 2012 planning rule, including sustainability, collaboration, best available science, and an all-lands approach.

What changes were made in response to public comments on the draft plan and DEIS?

A new preferred alternative (Alternative G) was developed in response to public comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). Alternative G is the preferred alternative for the FEIS and Draft Record of Decision (ROD). Alternative G is similar to Alternative B (DEIS proposed action). The main differences include additional acres of winter motorized recreation outside of crucial winter range, changes to summer motorized recreation, changes to suitability for oil and gas surface development, and modifications to special area boundaries.

How will the revised Plan change your current management practices?

Revision topics were identified in public meeting forums to determine the need for change in the Forest’s management of resources. The six major revision topics include:

1. Recreation uses and opportunities
2. Special areas and designations
3. Vegetation management
4. Wildlife habitat management
5. Oil and gas development
6. Commercial livestock grazing

Recreation uses and opportunities

- Summer motorized use: Maintains all existing open roads and motorized trails for public use. Identifies additional lands that would allow for future expansion of motorized routes.
- Winter motorized use: Maintains all existing snowmobile trails including those that pass through crucial winter range. Maintains areas currently open to cross country snowmobile use that does not impact crucial winter range.

- Non-motorized use: Existing area motorized closures associated with cross-country skiing totaling 6,800 miles are maintained. Total acres unavailable for motorized use are 1,909,010 acres for summer use and 1,845,600 acres for winter use.

Special Areas and Designations

- Identifies eight new Research Natural Areas, totaling 69,000 acres, for research, monitoring and education.
- Identifies three new Special Interest Areas, totaling 6,700 acres, which include two geological areas and one historical area.
- Identifies and maintains eligibility for 16 river segments into the Wild and Scenic River System. The Plan does not address suitability.
- Establishes management direction for the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail and the Nez Perce National Historic Trail.
- No recommendation to add to the existing 1.4 million acres of new Wilderness.

Vegetation Management

- Desired conditions and objectives respond to conditions associated with bark beetle epidemics and larger wildfires.
- Identifies acres of lands suitable for timber production (126,000 acres, 5% of forest).
- Provides wildlife habitat, timber products, and forage for grazing.
- Plan goals and objectives for treatments to reduce infestations of invasive plant species.
- Increases Aspen cover type by 15,000 acres.
- Restores 1,400 acres of whitebark pine.

Commercial Livestock Grazing

- Identifies 379,000 acres suitable for livestock grazing.
- Maintains term permitted commercial livestock grazing at the current level of 60,000 animal unit months plus or minus 10 percent in response to resource conditions.

Oil and Gas Development

- There is no change in the total amount of area available (approximately 1 million acres) for oil/gas leasing from the previous plan and the 1995 Oil/Gas Leasing Decision.
- Suitability for surface occupancy focused generally on those lands with high potential for oil and gas development including areas with existing leases.
- The revised plan reduces the acreage suitable for oil and gas surface development to 130,000 acres to protect big game winter range, maintain consistency with adjacent BLM and Wind River Reservation land management designations, and to address public comment. There is currently low potential for development in these areas.
- Suitability for surface occupancy is consistent with recommendations from State of Wyoming and the two Wind River tribes.

Wildlife Habitat Management

- Updates plan direction for federally protected species and Forest Service sensitive species.
- Includes standards, guidelines and monitoring questions for four management indicator species and five species of local concern.

- Includes standards and guidelines to protect big game crucial winter range. Existing recreation winter use is accommodated where feasible.
- Contains standards to reduce risk of disease transmission by prohibiting domestic goats from core native bighorn sheep range.

Why did we retain the Northern Rockies Lynx Management direction decision that amended the 1986 Forest Plan?

The decision has already gone through public review and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service consultation. There is no new science that indicates changing the decision is necessary.

Why did you not retain other recent decisions such as the Wildland Fire Use Amendment and the Clarks Fork River Management Plan?

Most of the elements of these recent decisions are carried forward into the revised Plan. We did find a need to make small adjustments to integrate those decisions into the new plan direction therefore we chose not to retain the original direction. Instead, we are redoing the decisions in the Revised Plan.

Did the allowable sale quantity decrease from the 1986 Forest Plan?

Allowable sale quantity increased to 22,800 Ccf in the revised Plan from 19,800 Ccf in the current plan.

How does the revised Plan meet the requirement to provide for diversity of plant and animal communities?

The revised Plan would maintain or enhance wildlife habitats by managing for a diversity of habitat conditions. It emphasizes cover types such as aspen and whitebark pine that have declined and sagebrush that is at a risk of decline. The revised Plan also provides for wildlife habitats by using vegetation treatments and natural fire to create naturally occurring vegetation conditions and patterns on the landscape. By doing so, the variety of habitats that native species would have evolved with would be provided into the future. Species would find the amounts and arrangements of habitats similar to what would have existed historically under natural disturbance regimes. Those species, with limited distributions or small populations, have additional attention to ensure their habitat requirements are met. This is achieved through additional direction in the revised Plan in the form of desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines.

How are inventoried roadless areas going to be managed?

The Shoshone has 689,000 acres of inventoried roadless area outside of designated Wilderness, or 28 percent of the forest. The 1986 Forest Plan is not consistent with the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The revised Plan incorporates direction to manage the acres of inventoried roadless according to the 2001 Roadless Rule as analyzed in Alternative G. Alternatives A, E and F are not consistent with the 2001 Roadless Rule. Consistent with the 1982 rule, Alternative G was developed to address concerns raised by some public groups and some local government officials concerning roadless area management. In the revised Plan, inventoried roadless areas are allocated primarily to management areas within categories 1 and 3 with smaller acreages in categories 2 and 4.

How will the wildland urban interface be managed?

Desired conditions in the revised Plan strive to reduce hazardous fuels in the wildland urban interface. The desired condition is to maintain vegetation conditions so that there is less risk that large wildfires will impact values in the wildland urban interface. The revised Plan identifies the need to continue treating

hazardous fuels in priority areas identified in the community wildfire protection plans developed by the counties.

How does the revised Plan address public access?

The revised Plan includes a goal and desired condition to provide motorized and non-motorized access, compatible with desired conditions and objectives for other resources. The revised Plan does not close any National Forest System roads, designated ATV or snowmobile trails currently open to the public. The revised Plan identifies areas that are suitable for the development of additional motorized access.

How will the Dunoir Special Management Unit be managed?

Winter motorized use will be excluded so that management is consistent with the enabling legislation. This is a change from the 1986 Forest Plan, which did not exclude this use. Mountain bike use will be allowed only on the Pinnacle Butte Trail.

What are the management indicator species in the revised Plan and why were they chosen?

The revised Plan establishes four management indicator species: ruffed grouse (aspen communities), Brewer's sparrow (sagebrush communities), red-breasted nuthatch (mature conifer forest with snags), and stream trout (streams and riparian habitat). The populations of these species are used to indicate the effects of management activities on their suitable habitats.

What are species of local concern and why was that category added?

Species of local concern are wildlife, insect, and plant species that have important social values, or are of concern because of their limited distribution or rarity. The revised Plan identifies elk, mule deer, moose, Yellowstone checkerspot (butterfly), Clark's nutcracker, and various rare plant species as species of local concern.

How does the revised Plan address fire and fuels management?

Wildfire will continue to be a significant influence on the landscape. The revised Plan would contribute to reducing hazardous fuels using vegetation treatments and wildlife. Mechanical and prescribed fire treatments would be targeted specifically in areas where hazardous fuels conditions are a concern. Total hazardous fuel reduction from mechanical and prescribed fire treatments treated in the next 10 to 15 years would be 36,000 acres.

Does the revised Plan change winter motorized access?

The 1986 Forest Plan generally allowed over-snow motorized vehicle use in all areas outside of designated wilderness, including in management areas allocated to non-motorized recreation, including the Dunoir Special Management Unit. Only summer motorized use was specifically restricted in those areas. Under the Revised Plan winter motorized use is allowed to continue in most areas outside of big game crucial winter range and within big game crucial winter range where Wyoming Game and Fish indicates that current use levels are not negatively impacting wintering big game. Use continues in areas with developed snowmobile trails. The revised Plan does exclude motorized in the Dunoir Special Management Unit as directed by the enabling legislation.

Does the revised Plan close any roads?

The Revised Plan makes no decisions to close roads. Travel management, a subsequent planning process that will follow plan revision, will determine the desired road network for the Shoshone. In the revised

Plan, all areas with roads currently open to the public are assigned to management areas that are suitable for that use.

What does the revised Plan do about the bark beetle epidemic?

The revised Plan contains direction to manage stands to reduce impacts from bark beetles in actively managed areas of the Shoshone. In these areas, active management can reduce stand susceptibility to bark beetles by reducing stand ages and increase age class and species diversity. Because of the high number of acres in wilderness and backcountry areas, there will still be large areas of the Shoshone subject to large scale bark beetle epidemics.

How was collaboration and public involvement conducted in developing the revised Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement?

The Shoshone has engaged stakeholders in the development of the Revised Plan since 2005. Seventy-five public and cooperator meetings were held between 2005 and 2009. Twelve public meetings, 9 cooperating agency meetings, and 2 meetings with the Eastern Shoshone and Northern Arapaho Tribes have been held during the current revision effort (since the 2010 Notice of Intent). Meetings were held with various advocacy organizations when requested, such as Wyoming Wilderness Association, Backcountry Horsemen, Greater Yellowstone Coalition, Wyoming Outdoor Council, The Sierra Club and timber and oil and gas industry officials. The cooperating agencies working group was established in 2006 through a formal cooperating agency Memorandum of Understanding and consists of representatives from 4 county commissions, 8 conservation districts and 9 State of Wyoming agencies.

The Draft Plan and DEIS were published in July 2012. The public submitted 23,475 letters during the 90-day public comment period. The comments came from 11 government agencies, 60 non-government organizations, and 994 individuals. The majority of the comments focused on motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, recommended Wilderness areas and other special designations, and the potential effects of oil and gas development on water, air, and wildlife. Responses to these comments were incorporated into the management direction of the revised Plan and as a new alternative, Alternative G, in the FEIS.

What happens next?

Upon release of the final land management plan documents, we entered into a pre-decisional administration review (objection) process for Land Management Plans that provides an individual or entity the opportunity for a Forest Service review and resolution of issues before Plan approval.

This objection process is prescribed by the 2012 Planning Rule. Provisions of this Rule that are applicable to this objection process are found in 36 CFR 219, subpart B. (See below for more information on the objection process)

Who is the Responsible Official for the Shoshone National Forest Land Management Plan?

The Responsible Official is the official with the authority and responsibility to oversee the planning process and to approve the plan revision. For the Shoshone National Forest, the Rocky Mountain Regional Forester, Daniel Jirón, is the responsible official.

Will there be public meetings?

Yes, we will hold public meetings to share information about the revised Plan, FEIS, and draft Record of Decision. The meetings will be held the week of February 24. All public meetings will be held from 5:00 pm to 7:00 pm at these locations:

- Cody – Monday, February 24, Grizzly Hall, Park County Library, 1500 Heart Mountain St.
- Dubois –Tuesday, February 25, Headwaters Art and Convention Center, 17 Stalnaker St.
- Lander –Wednesday, February 26, Monarch Hall at the Pronghorn Lodge, 150 East Main Street
- Thermopolis – Thursday, February 27, Big Horn Federal, 643 Broadway Street

What is the objection process?

The objection process is more of a collaborative approach to address concerns than is the traditional appeal process because the process is prior to the issuance of a decision, instead of after the issuance of a decision. The objection process provides an opportunity for members of the public who have been involved throughout the planning process to have any unresolved concerns receive an independent Forest Service review. Only those who provided substantive formal comments during opportunities for public comment are eligible to file an objection pursuant to regulations at 36 CFR 219 subpart B (unless the issue arose after the comment period).

What is a substantive formal comment?

Written comments submitted to, or oral comments recorded by the Responsible Official or his designee during an opportunity for public participation provided during the planning process, and attributed to the individual or entity providing them. Comments are considered substantive when they are within the scope of the proposal, are specific to the proposal, have a direct relationship to the proposal, and include supporting reasons for the responsible official to consider.

When does the objection filing period begin?

The 60-day objection filing period on the Final Land Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement begins on January 25, 2014, and ends on March 26, 2014. These dates are defined by the legal notice in the Denver Post regarding the beginning of the objection period for the Shoshone revised Plan.

Who is the objection reviewing officer? How can I submit objections?

The Objection reviewing officer is the Chief of the Forest Service, Tom Tidwell. Instructions for filing an objection are available on the internet at www.fs.usda.gov/detail/shoshone/home/?cid=stelprdb5379153. Information on filing objections can also be obtained by calling the Shoshone (307.527.624).

When will my objection be responded to?

Following the close of the objection filing period, the reviewing office shall issue a written response or otherwise resolve the objections within 90 days. The reviewing officer may extend this time when it is determined necessary to provide adequate response to objections or to participate in discussions with the parties.

When will the final Record of Decision be issued?

The Record of Decision for the revised plan will not be issued until the reviewing officer has responded to objections and any work necessary to make the decision consistent with the response to objections is completed. We estimate that the final Record of Decision will be issued in July of 2014.

Where can I learn more?

More information is available on the Shoshone National Forest website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/shoshone/>