# THE PROPOSED ACTION

The Forest Service proposes to revise the Land and Resource Management Plans (hereafter referred to as "Forest Plans") for the Sawtooth, Payette, and Boise National Forests. These revisions are proposed to meet legal and regulatory requirements, and to address changes, issues, and concerns that have arisen since the Forest Plans were originally released for the Sawtooth National Forest (USDA Forest Service 1987), Payette National Forest (USDA Forest Service 1988), and the Boise National Forest (USDA Forest Service 1990). The area covered under this revision includes the National Forests in the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup, shown in Figure 1-1.

# The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup

The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup is composed of an estimated 6,600,000 acres of National Forest System lands on the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests, primarily in southwestern Idaho. The Ecogroup administrative boundaries stretch west to the Oregon border, east to the Salmon-Challis National Forest, north to the Nez Perce National Forest, and south to Box Elder County in Utah.

The geology of the area features steep mountain ranges and deep river canyons, with elevations ranging from 1,600 to 12,000 feet. Temperatures can range from over 100 degrees Fahrenheit in summer to 40 below zero in winter. Annual precipitation can vary from under 10 inches (mostly as rain) in the low canyons to over 70 inches (mostly as snow) in the high mountains.

There are an estimated 14,400 stream miles and 62,520 acres of lakes on the Ecogroup. Major rivers in the Ecogroup area include the Snake, Salmon, South Fork Salmon, Middle Fork Salmon, East Fork Salmon, North Fork Payette, Middle Fork Payette, South Fork Payette, North Fork Boise, Middle Fork Boise, South Fork Boise, Weiser, Big Wood, and Raft.

The Ecogroup area of social and economic influence takes in more than 20 counties with a combined population of over 1 million people. The largest communities located near the Ecogroup area are Boise, Nampa, Caldwell, Twin Falls, Mountain Home, Weiser, Burley, Rupert, Jerome, Hailey, Ketchum, Sun Valley, McCall, and Cascade.

There are an estimated 5,000 miles of road and 1,200 miles of trails on the Boise National Forest that provide access to public lands. The Payette has approximately 3,000 miles of road and 2,000 miles of trail. The Sawtooth has an estimated 2,000 miles of road and 1,600 miles of trail.

There are about 1 million acres of designated wilderness within the Ecogroup, and over 3 million acres of inventoried roadless areas. Nearly 27,000 acres of Research Natural Areas have been established.

The wide variety of ecological conditions in the Ecogroup area provides habitat for over 50 fish species and 300 terrestrial vertebrate species (mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians), including deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, mountain goat, pronghorn antelope, cougar, and black



Figure 1.1. Vicinity Map for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup

bear. Habitat occurs for the following fish and wildlife species currently listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA): sockeye salmon, chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, bald eagle, gray wolf, Canada lynx, and northern Idaho ground squirrel. Habitat for a number of listed, proposed, or candidate plant species also exists in the Ecogroup area.

# The Ecogroup Forest Plan Revision Strategy

The three National Forests decided to revise their Forest Plans together and analyze the effects of this action in one Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The reasons for this collaboration are:

- The timing for revising the three Forest Plans is similar.
- The Forests share key issues, resources, customers, and interested publics.
- The Forests need to consider management of ecosystems across administrative boundaries.
- The three Forests comprise the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup, an Intermountain Region grouping with similar ecosystem components.
- The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Forest Plan Revision Team (hereafter referred to as the Revision Team) is comprised of planners and resource specialists from all three Forests. This combination provides opportunities to share personnel, services, budgets, knowledge, and experience, thereby increasing the overall efficiency and quality of the revision effort.

The Notice of Intent to revise the Boise and Payette Forest Plans, and amend the Sawtooth Forest Plan was published in the Federal Register on April 24, 1998. A revised Notice of Intent to revise all three Forest Plans was published in the Federal Register on May 17, 1999. The Federal Register was also used to announce the release of the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements and the Records of Decision.

# **Changes from DEIS to FEIS**

The Notice of Availability (NOA) for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) appeared in the Federal Register on November 24, 2000. The comment period on the DEIS, as published in the NOA, ended on March 16, 2001. In response to public request, the Regional Forester extended the comment period to June 15, 2001. The Ecogroup received 3,605 responses, including transcripts from formal public hearings, letters, electronic-mailings, and faxes on the Draft documents. The responses were analyzed using the content analysis process by a specialized Forest Service unit, the Content Analysis Team (CAT). Appendix A of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) summarizes who commented, what the comments were and the Agency's response to those comments.

Refinements to some management prescriptions (MPCs) were made in response to internal concerns, as well as external comments concerning restrictions in MPCs portrayed by the User Guide issued with the DEIS. These concerns were reviewed, and adjustments in the type and

intensity of activities allowed in some MPCs were made (refer to Forest Plans, Management Area Description and Direction section). Also for Inventoried Roadless Areas, MPCs were assigned by IRA boundaries rather than subwatershed boundaries, as they were in the DEIS.

Based on comments received, the significant issues section of this Chapter has been reformatted to include information as to how each issue was used in the revision process. While no new significant issues were identified from public comments, additional information and concerns related to the existing issues were received, and they have been incorporated into the issue descriptions and indicators.

Alternative 7 was generated in response to comments on the DEIS (see Appendix A and the project record). This alternative combines many elements of alternatives (particularly 3, 5, and 6) that were presented in the DEIS. Alternative 7 is an ecosystem-based management alternative that attempts to balance and integrate the wide range of management emphasis by:

- Maintaining the overall unroaded character of Inventoried Roadless Areas,
- Moving toward desired future conditions through restoration for aquatics, riparian, terrestrial, and vegetative conditions,
- Increasing emphasis on treatments within wildland-urban interface watersheds to reduce hazardous fuel conditions, and
- Providing for sustainable levels of goods and services, focusing on the roaded portions of National Forest System lands within the Ecogroup Forests' administrative boundaries.

A detailed description of Alternative 7 can be found in Chapter 2 of this FEIS. In addition to generation of Alternative 7, other alternatives suggested by comments on the DEIS were considered but eliminated from detailed study for reasons discussed in Chapter 2 of the FEIS (see project record for additional information). Finally, several changes were made to Chapter 3 resource analyses in response to several points and concerns raised in comments on the DEIS.

# PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

# **Purpose of the Proposed Action**

The purpose of the Proposed Action is to provide revised Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth Forest Plans that will: (1) guide all natural resource management activities on the Forests, (2) address changed conditions and direction that have occurred since the original plans were released, and (3) meet the objectives of federal laws, regulations, and policies. This purpose will be met by selecting a management strategy that best achieves a combination of the following goals:

- Maintain or restore long-term ecosystem health and integrity.
- Contribute to the economic and social needs of people, cultures, and communities.
- Provide sustainable and predictable levels of products and services from National Forest System lands on the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests.

- Emphasize adaptive management over the long term.
- Provide consistent direction at the Forest level that will assist managers in making project decisions at a local level in the context of broader ecological considerations.
- Replace interim direction (Pacfish/Infish and listed fish species Biological Opinions) with an ecosystem-based, long-term Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

# Need for the Proposed Action

The three Ecogroup Forest Supervisors initiated revisions of their respective Forest Plans based on a number of factors, including legal requirements, changed conditions, and Need For Change.

#### Legal Requirements

Regulations implementing the *National Forest Management Act (NFMA)* (1976) require the Regional Forester to revise forest plans and provide the basis for revision. In 1982, instructions to revise forest plans were formulated in the *Code of Federal Regulations* at 36 CFR 219. The regulations are currently being revised, but will not be finalized before the release of the Revised Forest Plans and this EIS. The final revised Plans will therefore be subject to direction provided by the 1982 regulations. Specific instructions found at 36 CFR 219.10(g) state:

"A forest plan shall ordinarily be revised on a 10-year cycle or at least every 15 years. It also may be revised whenever the Forest Supervisor determines that conditions or demands in the area covered by the plan have changed significantly, or when changes in RPA policies, goals, or objectives would have a significant effect on forest level programs."

The Forest Supervisors determined that revision was warranted because it was within the 10 to 15 year time period allotted for revision, and significant changes had occurred in conditions and demands. Legal challenges, described below, also contributed to the decision to initiate the Forest Plan revision process.

In 1994, the Wilderness Society, Idaho Conservation League, Sierra Club, and Idaho Sportsmen's Coalition filed a lawsuit against the Payette National Forest, challenging the Forest Plan's management of timber, roadless areas, fish and wildlife, and other items. As a result of negotiations with the plaintiffs, a settlement agreement was signed in 1995 that stated the Forest Service complete a revised Forest Plan for the Payette National Forest by December 31, 2000. That date was extended to July 31, 2003 due to additional changes and delays, and subsequent negotiations between the Forest and the plaintiffs.

In 1995, the Idaho Sporting Congress (ISC) filed a complaint against the Boise and Payette National Forests for failing to supplement their Forest Plan EISs to reflect changes caused by large wildfires in 1994. Idaho District Court Judge Winmill upheld the Forest Service on all

grounds in his September 25, 1996 decision. In August 1997, a three-judge panel of the Court upheld Judge Winmill's decision due to the fact that the Boise and Payette Forests were already addressing changes needed to the Forest Plans--including changed conditions created by the 1994 fires--through their Forest Plan revision process.

### **Changed Conditions**

National Forests monitor and evaluate management activities to determine how well forest plan management direction has been met and applied. Periodically the Forests document the results in a public report. The Ecogroup Forests completed Forest-wide monitoring reports in 1996 that highlighted changed conditions since the original Forest Plans were released. Some of the more significant changes are summarized below:

- Wildfires have affected an estimated 14 percent of the land base on the Boise National Forest and 13 percent on the Payette National Forest since their original Plans were released. (Since 1996 an additional 19 percent of the Payette National Forest has been affected by wildfire, for a total of 32 percent since the original Plan.)
- Substantial increases in noxious weeds and tree mortality have occurred in localized areas.
- Impacts to water quality from human-caused sediment have increased in some areas, and the State of Idaho has listed a number of stream segments in the Ecogroup as impaired water bodies.
- Damage to riparian areas has increased in some areas, primarily as a result of livestock and recreation uses.
- Interim direction from Pacfish and Infish forest plan amendments and terms and conditions resulting from Biological Opinions generated through consultation for species recently listed under the ESA, have required resource mitigation that is beyond original Forest Plan estimates for protection. This, in turn, has affected estimated outputs.
- New awareness, approaches, and management policies have emerged to promote the sustainability of ecosystems.
- Improved information gathering and organizing techniques (Geographic Information Systems, LANDSAT imagery, new resource inventories) have expanded our knowledge about the Forests.
- Species listed under the ESA have changed, with additions of chinook salmon, steelhead, and bull trout. Since 1996, additional species have been listed (e.g., Canada lynx, northern Idaho ground squirrel), while other species have been de-listed (peregrine falcon), or are proposed for de-listing (bald eagle). In addition, new plant species are proposed for the Region 4 Sensitive Species List.

## Need For Change

In 1997, the Forests documented the need to establish or change Forest Plan management direction (Need for Change) in the *Preliminary Analysis of the Management Situation Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997). Four primary sources for determining Need for Change items were used:

- Results of the three Forest Plan monitoring reports.
- Comparison of the latest regulatory and policy requirements with existing Forest Plan direction.
- Comments from Forest employees who have been implementing the Forest Plans.
- New information, such as research studies and the *Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project* scientific assessments.

Upon review of the existing documentation, the following eight Need for Change topics for Forest Plan revision were identified:

**Topic 1 - Biological Diversity.** This topic includes rare and unique species and habitats; Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive aquatic, terrestrial, and botanical species; successional stages; snags and coarse woody debris; vegetation composition and structure; landscape linkages; habitat edge; and horizontal and vertical diversity.

**Topic 2 - Fire and Smoke Management.** This topic includes fire as a ecological process and management tool, wildland/urban interface, smoke management, and air quality.

**Topic 3 - Habitat Fragmentation and Disruption.** This topic focuses on fragmentation and disruption to habitats caused by human activities—such as road building and improved access, timber harvest, and utility corridors—or through natural processes such as fire, insects, and disease.

**Topic 4 - Non-native Plants.** This topic addresses management of non-native plants, including noxious weeds and exotics, and their influence on vegetative diversity, fire regimes, and hydrologic function.

**Topic 5 - Rangelands/Grazing Resources.** This topic includes determination of rangeland capability, rangeland suitability, range management prescriptions for suitable lands, and wildlife and recreation interactions with livestock management.

**Topic 6 - Riparian and Aquatic.** This topic addresses riparian area and aquatic resource management, including rangeland and recreation influences.

**Topic 7 - Timber Suitability.** This topic includes identification of lands suited for timber management.

**Topic 8 - Management Emphasis Areas.** This topic addresses areas with special management emphasis, including Wild and Scenic Rivers, Wilderness Areas, roadless areas, Research Natural Areas (RNA), and the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (SNRA).

Some Need for Change topics became significant issues that are analyzed in this EIS, while other topics resulted in management direction changes that are found in the revised Forest Plans. A more detailed description of the Need for Change Topics can be found in Chapter II of the revised Forest Plans.

# **DECISIONS TO BE MADE**

# **Decisions Made in a Forest Plan**

The six key decisions made in a forest plan for long-term management of national forests are:

- Establishment of Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives, including a description of the desired future condition of the Forest (36 CFR 219.11[b]).
- Establishment of Forest-wide standards and guidelines to fulfill the requirements of 16 USC 1604 (NFMA) applying to future activities (36 CFR 219.13 to 219.27).
- Establishment of management areas and direction applying to future activities in those management areas (36 CFR 219.11[C]).
- Identification of lands not suited for timber production (16 USC 1604[k] and 36 CFR 219.14) and the allowable sale quantity (ASQ) determination for timber that may be sold from the suited timber base during each decade (36 CFR 219.16(a)).
- Establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements that will provide a basis for a periodic determination of the effects of management practices (36 CFR 219.11[d]).
- Recommendation to Congress of areas for wilderness classification where 36 CFR 219.17(a) applies.

# **Decisions to be Made in This Planning Process**

The revision planning process involves an environmental analysis (an EIS) with three separate Records of Decision, and three revised Forest Plans. This EIS analyzes a range of alternatives for revising management direction for the Ecogroup. The Responsible Official for this analysis and its decisions is the Regional Forester. Based on the analysis in the Draft EIS, comments received, and the Final EIS, the Responsible Official will select an alternative to revise the three Forest Plans. Documentation and rationale for this selection is included in the Records of Decision accompanying this Final EIS. The alternative selected will include the six key Forest Plan decisions listed above.

The Records of Decision will set a course of action for managing the Ecogroup Forests for the next 10 to 15 years. However, project-level environmental analysis will continue for specific proposals implementing the revised Forest Plans, such as the closure or obliteration of existing roads. For example, the Forest Plans contain general direction to close or obliterate roads to help

achieve management goals for biophysical resources and to increase management efficiency. However, a subsequent site-specific NEPA analysis and decision will have to be made before actually implementing a proposal to close or obliterate any specific road. This process is referred to as "staged decision-making" because a series of decisions are necessary to carry out projects as specific needs, priorities, locations, conditions, and stakeholder responses become evident.

## **ISSUES**

# **Issue Identification**

To identify significant issues for Forest Plan revision, comments were solicited from a number of sources, which fall into three categories:

- Need For Change from the *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997), which was derived from Forest monitoring reports, regulatory requirements, employee comments, and new information.
- Consultation with federally recognized tribes and federal representatives, including federal regulatory agencies, Congressional delegations, and Forest Service employees at the Regional, Forest, and District levels.
- Public involvement, including open houses, scoping letters, conversations, and meetings with special interest groups to discuss scoping comments.

The Revision Team compiled comments and concerns from all of these sources, then identified the preliminary issues that would: (1) help develop alternatives, (2) influence Forest Plan direction, or (3) be used to track potential effects from the alternatives in Chapter 3 of this EIS. The Revision Team presented these preliminary issues to the Responsible Official for review and selection of significant issues to be carried forward. The comments and concerns, and the process used for identifying issues, are presented in detail in Appendix A, Public Involvement. The significant issues are described below, followed by the issues that were not addressed in detail in this EIS.

# **Significant Issues**

Significant issues are unresolved issues used in environmental analysis to formulate alternatives, prescribe mitigation measures, or analyze environmental effects. At the forest planning level, mitigation measures are incorporated into management direction (goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) or management prescriptions that influence the type, amount, and intensity of management actions that are implemented under the Forest Plan. The Responsible Official selected significant issues for revision based on one or more of the following criteria:

• Would these issues be used to help develop management alternatives or management direction, or would they be used in the allocation of management prescriptions?

- Would the management alternatives, direction, or prescriptions have discernable effects on the issues or their related resources?
- Would effects to the issues be sufficiently different by alternative to provide the Responsible Official with rationale for choosing a preferred or selected alternative?

Significant issues are grouped by resource and are described below using an issue statement, a brief background explanation that includes how the issue was considered in the revision process, and a summary of the issue indicators used to track effects associated with the issue. More detailed information concerning the issues and indicators can be found in the various resource sections of Chapter 3 of this FEIS.

In the background statements, most issues are described in terms of how Forest Plan management strategies may affect specific resources or conditions. The term "management strategies" generally refers to Forest Plan management direction (i.e., goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines) and the allocation of management prescriptions (MPCs) that differ by alternative. The MPCs provide a broad range of management emphasis that would allow for a different mix of management activities and intensities to potentially occur under each alternative. The Forest Plans, however, do not authorize the implementation of any management activities.

### Air Quality and Smoke Management

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect air quality based on the amount of smoke produced by fire use and wildfire.

**Background to Issue:** The public's desire for clean air and good visibility presents a challenge for fire management within the Ecogroup area. Wildfires can have significant impacts on air quality, especially when they burn in areas with uncharacteristically high fuel loadings. Fire use affects air quality as well; however, the timing, location, and intensity of prescribed and wildland fire use can be controlled to a certain extent.

This issue was not used to develop alternatives, but it was used to develop specific management direction and to address potential effects to air quality from the different management strategies of the alternatives.

**Issue Indicators:** The indicators for this issue are estimated smoke emissions (i.e., PM 10 and PM 2.5) that could result from implementation of a management strategy compared to historical (pre-settlement) emissions by Forest or administrative unit. This includes estimated emissions generated from fire use or wildfire in forested and non-forested vegetative communities.

### Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources

**Issue Statement 1:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the loss of soil-hydrologic function and long-term soil productivity from uncharacteristically lethal wildfire within highly vulnerable subwatersheds.

Background to Issue 1: A Need For Change related to biological diversity was identified in the Preliminary AMS Summary (USDA Forest Service 1997) and is summarized here. There is a need for snag and coarse woody debris guidelines that help maintain ecosystem structure and function. There is a need for management direction and emphasis that address important soilhydrologic processes and natural and management-related disturbance processes (erosion rates, landslides, infiltration, nutrient cycling, etc.) as they relate to desired conditions and management of other resources. New information from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project, and new research (Meyer et al. 2001, Moody and Martin 2001a and 2001b, Rieman and Clayton 1997, Benda and Dunne 1997) have linked accelerated soil erosion, loss of nutrient base. and triggering of floods, landslides, and debris flows uncharacteristic of their normal pattern and frequency, to uncharacteristically large and lethal stand replacing wildfires. This is especially a concern in subwatersheds that have high to extreme uncharacteristic vegetation hazards and high inherent vulnerability ratings. Management strategies that reduce extreme or high vegetation hazards, thus lowering risk to uncharacteristic or lethal wildfires, help reduce the potential for accelerated soil erosion, loss of nutrient base, and triggering of floods, landslides, and debris torrents.

The assumption is—the lower the risk, the lower the fire-related potential for soil erosion and landslides to affect human life or property over the long term. Thus, management strategies that place more subwatersheds that have potential post-wildfire risks to human life and property, high subwatershed vulnerability, and high or extreme uncharacteristic forest vegetation hazard into MPCs that would likely have limited or no vegetation restoration treatments to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically lethal wildfire (1.1, 1.2, 2.0, 2.1, 2.2, 4.1 a, 4.1b) will result in greater negative effects.

This issue was not used to develop alternatives, but is closely related to Fire Issue 2, which did have a role in alternative development. This issue was primarily used to analyze potential affects to soil resources associated with effects from Fire Issue 2, which vary by alternative.

**Issue Indicators for Issue 1:** Potential effects from alternatives are compared through a combination of the following indicator components:

- Highly vulnerable subwatersheds that have high or extreme uncharacteristic forest vegetation hazard (PVG and current stand structure, density and composition).
- Management Prescriptions (MPCs) that <u>emphasize vegetative restoration treatments</u> to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically lethal wildfire (MPC 2.4, 3.2, 4.1c, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2).
- Management Prescriptions (MPCs) that would likely have <u>limited or no vegetation</u> restoration treatments to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically lethal wildfire (MPC 1.1, 1.2, 2.0, 2.1, 2.2, 4.1a, 4.1b).

**Issue Statement 2**: Forest Plan management strategies may affect the number of subwatersheds considered at risk to post-wildfire floods and debris flows with potential effects to human life and property following uncharacteristically lethal wildfire.

**Background to Issue 2:** There is a need to reduce potential negative effects to human life, property, and municipal watersheds in subwatersheds that have been identified as a potential post-wildfire risk to human life and property from post-wildfire floods, landslides, and debris flows. These subwatersheds would likely require Burned Area Emergency Response (BAER) if an uncharacteristically lethal wildfire were to occur within them. One of the main objectives in implementing BAER measures is to initiate action promptly for immediate rehabilitation following wildfires to minimize "Threats to Human Life and Property" (Forest Service Handbook 2509.13).

New information and research continues to identify the potential for post-wildfire accelerated soil erosion, flooding and triggering of landslides uncharacteristic of their normal pattern and frequency following large uncharacteristic wildfire (Meyer et al. 2001, Moody and Martin 2001a and 2001b, Benda and Dunne 1997). This is especially a concern in subwatersheds that have high to extreme uncharacteristic vegetation hazards and high inherent vulnerability ratings. Management strategies (prescribed fire or mechanical vegetation treatment) that reduce these risks help reduce the post-wildfire threats and associated rehabilitation costs to these subwatersheds. The potential for using these types of strategies can be inferred from the MPCs that have been assigned to these subwatersheds by alternative.

This issue was not used to develop alternatives, but is closely related to Fire Issue 2, which did have a role in alternative development. This issue was primarily used to analyze potential affects to soil and water resources associated with effects from Fire Issue 2, which vary by alternative.

**Issue Indicators for Issue 2:** Potential effects from alternatives are compared through a combination of the following indicator components:

- Subwatersheds that have potential post-wildfire risks to human life and property, high subwatershed vulnerability, and high or extreme uncharacteristic forest vegetation hazard.
- Management Prescriptions (MPCs) that <u>emphasize vegetative restoration treatments</u> to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically lethal wildfire (MPC 2.4, 3.2, 4.1c, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2).
- Management Prescriptions (MPCs) that would likely have <u>limited or no vegetation</u> restoration treatments to reduce the risk of uncharacteristically lethal wildfire (MPC 1.1, 1.2, 2.0, 2.1, 2.2, 4.1a, 4.1b).

**Issue Statement 3:** Forest Plan management strategies may have potential effects on soil productivity, accelerated soil erosion and sedimentation, water quality, riparian function, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) water bodies, and listed Section 303(d) Water Quality Limited (WQL) water bodies.

**Background to Issue 3:** Since the development of the existing plans, numerous WQL water bodies have become listed as impaired under the Clean Water Act, and new assessments have been and are being developed to help determine appropriate water quality restoration plans. Watershed restoration is applied at various intensities under the Forest Plan alternatives to improve soil, water, and riparian conditions and help de-list subwatersheds with TMDLs or 303(d) WQL water bodies. There are approximately 50 subwatersheds within TMDL plans and approximately 200 subwatersheds identified as 303(d) WQL water bodies within the Ecogroup

area. De-listing of subwatersheds that have TMDLs or 303(d) WQL water bodies should be more likely to occur when management direction is applied that emphasizes the appropriate watershed and aquatic restoration or conservation strategies. The analysis examines how management strategies considered would affect de-listing the TMDLs, 303(d) WQL water bodies by improving soil productivity, water quality, and beneficial uses.

This issue was used to develop alternative restoration/conservation strategies to address soil productivity, erosion, landslides/mass movements, sedimentation, water quality, riparian function, and Section 303(d)/TMDL concerns. This issue was also used to develop management direction and to track potential effects of the various alternative management strategies related to the concerns listed above.

Issue Indicators for Issue 3: The indicators for this issue are:

- Potential Effects from Vegetation Treatments, Roads and Fire Use. The amount of suited timberland acres within subbasins, and the percentage of ERT acres relative to thresholds of concern (TOC) in subbasins are compared by alternative.
- Potential Effects from Livestock Grazing. The amount of suitable rangeland acres by subbasin, and the percents of MPC acres that would result in less restrictive and more restrictive grazing management strategies in subbasins are compared by alternative.
- Comparison of subwatersheds that have 303(d) WQL water bodies, and MPCs that emphasize the appropriate restoration/conservation strategies to assist in the de-listing of those water bodies.
- Comparison of subwatersheds that have TMDLs assigned, and MPCs that emphasize the appropriate restoration/conservation strategies to meet the intent of the TMDL plans.
- Potential Effects from Motorized Trail Use in Recommended Wilderness Areas.

**Issue Statement 4:** Forest Plan management strategies may have potential effects on aquatic habitat and species, including species that are listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act, Region 4 sensitive species, species at risk, and Forest Management Indicator Species.

**Background to Issue 4:** Since the development of the existing plans, several fish species have become listed under ESA, and interim land management strategies protecting anadromous (Pacfish) and resident (Infish) fish species have been amended into existing plans. Subsequent biological opinions (BOs) for bull trout, steelhead, and chinook have also amended the plans. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has also developed draft recovery plans and proposed critical habitat for bull trout. Existing plans do not consistently support these new events and mandates. Long-term watershed and aquatic restoration strategies were never developed as part of interim or BO strategies and, this deficiency is recognized as a significant shortcoming to the conservation and recovery of listed species.

Four species of native fish have been listed as Threatened or Endangered under the ESA. There are also two fish species on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species List. Improvement of TES and other native fish habitat should occur when management direction is applied that emphasizes the appropriate watershed and aquatic restoration or conservation strategies.

This issue was used in development of alternative restoration/conservation strategies to assist in the recovery or conservation of ESA listed species and Region 4 sensitive species. Strategies were developed through adjustments in MPC allocations in watersheds that have ESA listed species and/or Region 4 sensitive species. The issue was also used in developing management direction and for tracking potential effects of the alternatives to aquatic species and their habitats.

Issue Indicators for Issue 4: The indicators for this issue are:

- Potential Effects from Vegetation Treatments, Roads, and Fire Use. The amount of suited timberland acres within subbasins, and the percentage of ERT acres relative to thresholds of concern (TOC) in subbasins for selected fish species are compared by alternative.
- Potential Effects from Livestock Grazing. The amount of suitable rangeland acres by subbasin, and the percents of MPC acres that would result in less restrictive and more restrictive grazing management strategies in subbasins for selected fish species are compared.
- Potential Effects from Wildfire vs. Treatments to Reduce Wildfire Hazard. Potential effects to listed, sensitive, and special concern fish species were analyzed by comparing amount of area in MPCs that have a high emphasis and more tools available to treat subwatersheds with high and extreme risks to uncharacteristic wildfire to those with fewer tools available. This information is overlaid with fish species population status to examine risk to populations of treating vs. not treating vegetation.
- Potential Effects from Aquatic Restoration.
- Potential Effects from Motorized Trail Use in Recommended Wilderness Areas.

#### **Terrestrial Wildlife Habitat and Species**

**Issue Statement 1:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect habitat for terrestrial wildlife species, including species that are listed or proposed for listing under the Endangered Species Act, Region 4 sensitive species, species of special interest, species at risk, and Forest Management Indicator Species.

**Background to Issue 1:** Forest Plan management strategies that do not provide any substantial restrictions on activities such as road construction, timber harvest, livestock grazing, recreation, mining, and fire use could increase habitat alteration and fragmentation, as well as disturbance to species. These impacts, in turn, could negatively affect species viability. Viability is a concern for all terrestrial species, but particularly for Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, or Sensitive species for which habitat and/or populations may be currently in decline.

This issue was used in development of alternative habitat restoration strategies to assist in the recovery or conservation of ESA listed species and Region 4 sensitive species. Desired conditions were described for potential vegetation groups to address species viability and habitat needs. Adjustments in MPC allocations provided for alternative approaches in achieving those needs. This issue was also used in the development of management direction relative to habitat alteration and fragmentation, and for tracking potential effects of the alternatives to terrestrial species and their habitats.

**Issue Indicators for Issue 1:** The indicators for this issue area changes in potential vegetation groups or cover types in terms of vertical stand structure and size class, stand density, vegetative species composition, and snags and coarse woody debris.

**Issue Statement 2:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect disruption, vulnerability, and disease risk to terrestrial wildlife species.

**Background to Issue 2:** Some species of wildlife are sensitive to human activities in close proximity during the breeding, nesting and wintering portions of their life cycles. Human activities, whether intentional or unintentional, can increase stress to some species and may reduce their reproductive success. Wide-ranging carnivores—such as the gray wolf and the wolverine—are habitat generalists that are more susceptible to population disruption than habitat change. Elk are also habitat generalists and are of great social and economic importance in Idaho and Utah. Of particular concern is elk vulnerability during hunting season. Bighorn sheep populations have declined in the Ecogroup area during the last 100-150 years. Although these species have no status under the ESA, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is concerned about their population status and viability. One threat is the risk of disease transmission from domestic sheep to bighorn sheep, where their grazing overlaps and the potential for direct contact exists.

This issue was used in alternative development through rangeland suitability variations to address the risk of disease transmission to bighorn sheep. This issue was also used for developing management direction and tracking potential effects of the alternatives to terrestrial species and their habitats relative to the potential for disruption and disease transmission.

Issue Indicators for Issue 2: The indicators for this issue are:

- Risk of human-related disruption to wide-ranging carnivores and other species
- Road densities related to disruption potential.
- Acres of suitable domestic sheep range within bighorn sheep habitat.

#### **Botanical Resources**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Candidate, Sensitive (TEPCS) and watch plant species populations and habitats.

**Background to Issue:** Many vascular plant species are endemic to the Ecogroup area, and some of these are considered rare by conservation organizations or federal agencies. Four of these rare endemics are found only on National Forest System lands within the Ecogroup area, and many of the rare endemics have a large portion of their global distribution on National Forest lands. In contrast, several plant species have wide global distributions but are rare within the Ecogroup area. The potential effects of Forest Plan management strategies on the most rare plant species within the Ecogroup area will be assessed.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop specific management direction to provide protection for botanical resources. It also was used to track potential effects on TEPCS and watch plants from ground-disturbing activities associated with the management strategies of the alternatives.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Threats from fire (wildfire and prescribed burning),
- Threats from livestock grazing (herbivory, trampling, and associated impacts),
- Threats from recreation,
- Threats from mechanical treatments associated with vegetation management, and
- Threats from noxious weed establishment and spread.

## **Vegetation Diversity**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect vegetative biodiversity by changing size class, species composition, density, structure, snags, and coarse woody debris.

**Background To Issue:** Comments received about vegetation were varied with regard to how vegetation should look and function. This analysis focuses on changes in vegetation structure and composition that may occur under the management alternatives. The analysis forms the foundation for how vegetation may function for other resources such as timber, range, wildlife habitat, fire, and scenic environment. Current conditions and effects are described for forested vegetation, including forestlands, riverine riparian areas, snags, and coarse woody debris, and for non-forested vegetation, including shrublands, grasslands, woodlands, and deciduous riparian areas.

This issue was used to develop alternative desired conditions for vegetative diversity, using Historical Range of Variability (HRV) as reference conditions for components such as size class, species composition, density, structure, snags, and coarse woody debris. Desired conditions varied based on MPC emphasis, and MPC allocations provided for alternative approaches in achieving the desired conditions. This issue was also used in the development of management direction and in tracking potential effects of the alternatives to biodiversity components.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

### Forested Vegetation

- Size class changes toward desired and historical size classes by Forest and PVG
- Canopy closure changes toward desired and historical canopy closures by Forest and PVG -
- Species composition changes toward desired condition and historical seral status by Forest and PVG
- Summary of all the components from desired and historic conditions by Forest
- Percentage of large trees by alternative in the second and fifth decades

### Non-forested Vegetation

- Acres of big sagebrush (three subspecies) and low sagebrush in low, medium, or high canopy cover classes, as compared to the desired conditions for each alternative and historical estimates
- Acres of climax aspen in a range of size and canopy cover classes, as compared to the desired conditions for each alternative and historical estimates
- Acres of pinyon-juniper in a range of size and canopy cover classes, as compared to the desired conditions for each alternative and historical estimates

• Acres of grassland cover types in moderate or high risk condition that occur within low, medium, or high vegetative restoration Management Prescription Categories (MPCs)

#### Riparian Vegetation

- Percentage of large trees by alternative with in the second and fifth decades for forested (riverine) riparian areas
- Overall synthesis of forested PVGs for meeting desired conditions and historical conditions
- Acres of deciduous riparian cover types in moderate or high risk condition that occur within low, medium, or high vegetative restoration MPCs

### **Vegetation Hazard**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the amount of vegetation at risk to uncharacteristic wildfire and epidemic insect disturbances.

**Background to Issue:** Concerns were expressed internally and externally about the risk of large uncharacteristic disturbances, such as wildfires, that have occurred since the mid-1980s. In many cases, these events affect a host of resources—including fisheries, wildlife habitat, timber, visual quality, and soils—and cost millions of dollars to suppress and mitigate. The long-term impacts of these disturbances prompted comments about the likelihood of such events occurring in the future, and the potential to reduce the risks. Fire and insect hazard indices are directly related to changes in vegetative conditions including size class and/or density that would vary by the type and amount of vegetation treatment associated with each alternative.

This issue was used in development of alternatives through identification of areas at risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire and epidemic insect outbreaks, and alternative management approaches through MPC allocations to address the risks. This issue was also used to analyze the effectiveness of the alternatives in reducing the risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire and epidemic insect outbreaks.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Insect hazard index for forested vegetation
- Uncharacteristic wildfire hazard index for forested and non-forested vegetation

## **Non-native Plants**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies have the potential to influence non-native plant establishment, spread, detection, and control.

**Background To Issue:** Non-native plants are species that do not have their origin in a local area, and include exotic plants and noxious weeds. Noxious weed and exotic plant species are spreading rapidly locally, regionally, and nationally. Noxious weeds classified as invaders pose the greatest threat. Infestations can substantially change the biological diversity of an area by affecting the amount and distribution of native plants and animals. They can also have negative impacts on recreation, regeneration, wildlife and livestock forage, soil productivity, fire cycles, nitrogen cycling, riparian and hydrologic function, and water quality. Primary concerns related

to Forest noxious weed management are: (1) effectively identifying and managing sources of weed establishment and spread, (2) the need to coordinate weed management across jurisdictional boundaries and adjacent landownerships, and (3) the ability to implement weed management over the long-term based upon budgets, management direction, priorities, and resource integration. These variables will likely change by alternative.

This issue was used to develop management direction relative to the establishment, spread and control of non-native plants. It was also used to analyze how the alternatives address the susceptibility to noxious weed invasion and spread.

**Issue Indicators:** The indicators for this issue are:

- Estimated total acres of high susceptibility to noxious weed invasion within MPCs that have a high exposure to invasion risk, moderate to high detection, and high ability to treat
- Estimated total acres of high susceptibility to noxious weed invasion within MPCs that have low to moderate exposure to invasion risk, low detection, and low to moderate ability to treat
- Estimated total noxious weed acres by Forest during the short term
- Effects within fire regimes/PVGs that have most departed from historical conditions.

### **Fire Management**

**Issue Statement 1:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the restoration and maintenance of the ecological role of fire in ecosystems.

**Background to Issue 1:** Forest Service fire personnel expressed concerns about meeting the intent of the changes articulated initially in the 1995 Fire Management Policy and Program Review and subsequently in the National Fire Plan. Issues raised to date have included how past land management activities and decisions have affected the role of fire as an ecosystem process, as well as the potential for large wildfires. Generally the public agrees that there is a need to address the risk of large wildfires. However, there is strong disagreement as to what are the appropriate methods to address this concern. Research has shown that fire plays important ecological roles in ecosystem processes and functions such as landscape dynamics, nutrient cycling, and germination or regeneration of many graminoid, forb, or shrub species (Arno et al. 1993, Arno et al. 1995, Covington et al. 1997, Harrington 1996, Kauffman 1990, Lyon et al. 1978, Morgan and Murray 2001, Newland and DeLuca 2000, Romme 1982). Some members of the public felt that using fire rather than timber harvest destroyed valuable timber resulting in lost economic opportunities, reduced wildlife habitat, and increased sedimentation. Others felt that use of timber harvest rather than fire resulted in similar resource effects.

This issue was used in alternative development through identification of areas at risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire and alternative management approaches through MPC allocations to address the risks. The differences in management approach can be described in terms of MPCs that use fire versus fire/mechanical treatments for vegetation management. This issue was also used to analyze the effectiveness of the alternatives in reducing the risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire.

**Issue Indicator for Issue 1:** The indicator for this issue is percentage of acres treated using fire compared to estimated historical acres burned, by Forest.

**Issue Statement for Issue 2:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the amount of vegetation at risk to wildfire, and at what rate hazardous conditions are reduced in areas where there are threats to life and private property (wildland-urban interface).

**Background to Issue 2:** Concerns regarding interface were raised initially during the 1995 Fire Management Policy and Program Review. The review noted that while fire protection and prevention in wildland-urban interface were not new problems, fuel build-ups and population growth had increased risks. Resources available to suppress wildfires were often spread thin, jeopardizing property, natural resources, firefighter, and public safety. Property losses and expenditures to suppress wildfires were all increasing. These concerns were highlighted during the 2000 fire season when over 8,000,000 acres burned nationally (NIFC 2003). During this fire season 2.3 times more acres burned than the annual average from 1990 through 1999. During the 2000 fire season, 861 structures were lost to wildfire. In 2001, while the acres burned nationally were similar to the 10-year average, 731 structures burned. These wildfires provided poignant examples of wildfire risks in wildland-urban interface and have generated much public concern.

The 2000 fire season resulted in the National Fire Plan (USDA Forest Service 2000), which was developed in part to address the increasing concern about the risks and impacts of wildfires on wildland-urban interface. The National Fire Plan provides a strategic framework for addressing these risks, including identifying the roles of federal, tribal, state, and private land managers and owners in risk management. The plan also provides funding for a variety of actions. These actions include fuels reductions designed to increase the chances of suppressing wildfires while they are still small and of low intensity in areas where large wildfires are a concern. Such reduction will in turn increase firefighter and public safety and decrease threats to communities.

This issue was used to develop alternatives through MPC allocations to address treatment to reduce wildfire risks. This issue is closely related to the Vegetation Hazard issue but focuses on wildland-urban interface areas at risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire. The differences in management approach can be described in terms of MPCs that use fire versus fire/mechanical treatments for vegetation management. This issue was also used for analyzing the effectiveness of the alternatives in reducing the risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire, and for developing specific management objectives to reduce wildfire risks in wildland-urban interface.

**Issue Indicator for Issue 2:** The indicator for this issue is MPCs assigned to wildland-urban interface subwatersheds for each alternative and how they address the risk of wildfire (uncharacteristic and those that may result from high resistance-to-control) in forested vegetation by Forest.

#### **Rangeland Resources**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect rangeland resources, including lands considered suitable for livestock grazing and the form of livestock grazing management authorized under permit for the Forests.

**Background to Issue:** Re-evaluation of rangeland capability and suitability during forest plan revision effects where livestock may be grazed under a specific alternative (i.e. on suited rangelands). The forest plan also defines the desired outcomes and prescriptive measures (i.e. standards and guidelines under each resource section related to grazing) that are then used during the more site-specific AMP analysis and decision process. During the AMP process alternative grazing practices are considered that are needed to meet the desired outcomes and prescriptive measures found in the forest plan. This may or may not result in a reduction in AUMs or Head Months. Each AMP process will tailor a suite of grazing practices for each allotment, as needed, to meet desired outcomes and prescriptive direction found in the revised plans.

This issue was not directly used in alternative development, but was considered as one of the factors in Socio-economic issue 1, which was used to develop alternatives. This issue was also used to develop specific management direction associated with livestock grazing, to indicate influences on (recreation conflicts, risk of disease transmission, noxious weeds, etc.) and changes in suitable rangelands by alternative, and to address the effects of alternative management strategies on the rangeland program.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Estimated suitable rangeland acres by Forest
- Estimated suitable rangeland that occurs within less restrictive and more restrictive management prescription categories (MPC).

#### **Timberland Resources**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the amount of suited timberlands and sustainable timber managed by the Forests.

**Background to Issue:** Comments received on timber suitability and management revealed a wide range of opinions, including opposing points of view on how and how much timber should be managed. These comments were compiled and used to develop issues that address two primary areas of interest; how much land and which lands are included as suited timberlands; and what is the sustainable level of timber harvest. Concerns related to timber management included costs and values of implementation, supply and demand for timber, and effects on community stability. These concerns are addressed in the *Socio-economic Environment* section of Chapter 3.

Timberlands previously identified as not suited for timber production are required by law to be reassessed every 10 years. Other factors that warrant a timber reassessment include changes in land ownership, allocation of some land to specific uses, and new technology available for assessing land status.

This issue was not directly used in alternative development, but was considered as one of the factors in Socio-economic issue 1, which was used to develop alternatives. This issue was used in developing direction specific to sustainable timber management objectives and mitigation for harvest-related practices. The issue was also used to track effects on suited timberlands and potential yields of timber and other wood products by alternative.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Suited Timberlands
- Potential yield of timber and other wood products.

#### **Recreation**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect recreation resources, experiences, and opportunities.

**Background to Issue** - Many comments were received related to recreation management and experiences on the Ecogroup Forests. These comments included diverse topics such as motorized and non-motorized travel, trail protection, ski area expansion, recreation residence management, resource protection from recreation activities, and the need to make recreation a Need For Change topic.

MPCs and their related direction (i.e. goals, objectives, standards and guidelines) vary in their potential effect on recreation settings, resources and experiences. For example, management prescriptions and direction for aquatic, riparian, watershed and wildlife resources can result in a variety of effects to recreation facilities, opportunities, and potential development. Recreation facilities and activities can cause impacts, such as sedimentation and wildlife disturbance, that need to be mitigated or eliminated. Potential mitigation ranges from facility modifications and seasonal restrictions to facility decommissioning and removal. Some of these mitigations are mandatory, arising from compliance with the Endangered Species Act, and some depend on a combination of management emphasis and watershed priority. Although mitigation impacts to developed recreation facilities may occur at any location, facilities in watersheds that have been classified as high priority for restoration with an assigned Management Prescription Category (MPC) of 3.1 or 3.2, are the most likely to be affected.

Management direction for vegetation restoration and commodity production may also affect recreation opportunities and experiences. The most common vegetation restoration activities would involve timber harvest and/or prescribed fire, to achieve desired vegetative conditions. Timber commodity production would also include timber harvest. All of these actions have the potential to alter recreation settings and experiences. Landscapes classified with a high or extreme uncharacteristic wildfire hazard and are assigned to MPCs 5.1, 5.2 or 6.1 have a greater potential to change recreation settings and result in user conflicts.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop specific management direction and prescription allocations, and to track potential effects to recreation resources from the different management strategies of the alternatives.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Estimated changes in acres of each Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) class.
- Acres having high or extreme ratings for either uncharacteristic wildfire hazard or resistance to control that are assigned a 5.1 or 6.1 MPC.

- Number of developed recreation sites located within high priority subwatersheds assigned to MPC 3.2.
- Total acres of MPCs 3.1 and 3.2 within high priority restoration subwatersheds.
- Projected total miles of Forest Classified Roads in 2015.
- Projected miles of unclassified roads decommissioned by 2015.

### Scenic Environment

Issue Statement: Forest Plan management strategies may affect the scenic environment.

**Background to Issue:** The scenic environment is the general appearance of a place or landscape, or the features of a landscape. The visual condition varies by location and is dependent on human developments and natural features such as geology, vegetation, and landforms. The Sawtooth, Payette, and Boise National Forests provide some of the highest quality scenery in the Intermountain West. Enjoyment of these scenic resources is an integral part of many recreation experiences, and scenic attractions have contributed to making these Forests nationally recognized recreation destinations. Although no specific scenic resource issues were identified during public comment periods, many Forest management activities have the potential for affecting scenic resources. These effects could be significant and may vary considerably by alternative. Therefore, potential effects on scenic resources are analyzed by assessing potential changes in Visual Quality Objective class by alternative.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to validate effectiveness of current plan direction and develop new management direction. It was also used to analyze potential affects to scenic resources from the different management strategies of the alternatives.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Acres of each Visual Quality Objective class.
- Acres of change in the Visual Quality Objective class from current levels.
- Levels of landscape-changing management activities.
- Uncharacteristic wildfire hazard index for forested vegetation and insect hazard index for forested vegetation.

### Cultural Resources

Issue Statement: Forest Plan management strategies may affect cultural resources.

**Background to Issue:** Forest management activities have the potential for directly, indirectly, or cumulatively affecting cultural resources through management activities that influence site disturbance or discovery, or that improve or restrict access to sites, or that provide the opportunity and funding for conducting site surveys and recordation. These activities are related to many of the Need for Change topics, and would be implemented under any of the alternatives. Compliance with federal laws governing cultural resources is an important management concern.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop new management direction to reflect changes in law and policy. It was also used to analyze potential affects to cultural resources from the different management strategies of the alternatives.

**Issue Indicators:** The indicator for this issue is acres of vegetation treatments in the first two decades.

### **Tribal Rights and Interests**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the availability of resources and the use of traditional places important to American Indian rights and interests.

**Background to Issue:** A primary issue for the tribes within the Ecogroup is the availability and protection of treaty and cultural resources, including use and access to traditional places. The issue is the availability of resources in sufficient quantities to support the continued exercise of treaty rights and cultural practices. Adequate availability would allow harvest or utilization of resources in sufficient quantities to satisfy the ceremonial and subsistence needs of tribes, while still providing for the conservation needs of the species. Adequate access would not compromise cultural practices at traditional, cultural, or spiritual places. Resources need to be inventoried for impacts from non-Indian commercial harvest, and watershed conditions need to be assessed in terms of habitat conditions and restoration needs.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop specific management direction, and to address potential affects to tribal rights and interests from the different management strategies of the alternatives.

**Issue Indicators:** The indicators for this issue are:

- Changes in access to traditional cultural properties.
- The relationship of species viability to tribal harvest ability.
- Trends in watershed conditions.

### **Roads**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the road transportation system and how these roads are maintained.

**Background to Issue:** Management of national forest roads is an issue of national concern. Critical issues linked to the forest road systems include public access, resource damage, habitat loss, maintenance capabilities, and economics. Although roads are known to have impacts on other resources, some level of road development is needed to produce the goods and services that Americans expect from their national forests. The agency's Roads Management Policy (Federal Register, Vol. 66, No. 9, 2001) highlighted roads as a national emphasis area for Forest management. Internal and external comments revealed two primary concerns about the potential effects of Forest Plan revision on roads: the amount of roads that are available for access and how these roads are maintained.

While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop management direction and to analyze potential affects of the alternatives on road availability and maintenance.

Issue Indicators: The indicators for this issue are:

- Projected total miles of Forest Classified Roads in 2015
- Estimated miles of unclassified roads decommissioned by 2015
- Percentage of anticipated 2015 Forest Classified Roads maintained to standard based on experienced budget averages.

### **Inventoried Roadless Areas**

**Issue Statement 1:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the capability for development or wilderness potential of existing Inventoried Roadless Areas.

**Background to Issue 1:** Areas that are roadless and undeveloped can be assigned one of three basic management prescriptions by the Forest Plan: 1) development, 2) prescriptions that maintain the undeveloped character, or 3) recommended wilderness. Comments on how to manage the Ecogroup roadless areas were highly polarized between developing the areas to leaving them in an undeveloped or potential wilderness condition.

This issue was used in alternative development, management direction and prescriptions, and analysis of how the Forest Service proposes to manage the current Inventoried Roadless Areas within the Ecogroup area for each alternative.

Issue Indicators for Issue 1: The indicators for this issue are:

- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPCs 2.3, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.2, or 8.0) that allow a full range of development opportunities.
- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPCs 3.1, 3.2, 4.1b, 4.1c) that have potential for low levels of development.
- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPCs 2.1-Wild, 2.2, 4.1a) that maintain their undeveloped roadless character.
- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPC 1.2) that recommends the area for wilderness designation.

**Issue Statement 2:** Forest Plan management strategies for existing Inventoried Roadless Areas may affect the capability to treat forest health problems.

**Background to Issue 2:** A national issue that has risen to prominence since the DEIS has centered on the condition of much of the nation's National Forests relative to susceptibility for uncharacteristic wildfires. The Forest Service's National Fire Plan was developed in response to this growing issue. Although forest health problems occur within developed and undeveloped areas in National Forests, much of the debate has focused on IRAs where the agency's ability to treat problem areas may be hampered by reduced access and treatment options. Given the large proportion of National Forest System lands comprised by IRAs, concern exists that the overall effectiveness in addressing forest health problems would be greatly limited unless areas within IRAs can also be effectively treated. The ability to address forest health provides involves two elements that in turn affect IRAs: the treatments and access that are available to managers in areas in need of treatment.

This issue was used in development of alternatives through identification of IRA acres at risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire and development of alternative management approaches through MPC allocation to address the risks. The differences in management approach can be described in terms of MPCs that provide for a full range of vegetation treatments and access in IRAs versus those that limit access and/or treatment options. This issue was also used to analyze how effective the alternatives are in reducing the risk for large, uncharacteristic wildfire within IRAs.

Issue Indicators for Issue 2: The indicators for this issue are:

- Acres within IRAs having high or extreme uncharacteristic wildfire hazard ratings, high or extreme ratings for resistance to control, or high insect hazard ratings assigned to MPCs 2.3, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2 or 8.0 that would allow both a full range of treatments and access capabilities.
- Acres within IRAs having high or extreme uncharacteristic wildfire hazard ratings, high or extreme ratings for resistance to control, or high insect hazard ratings assigned to MPCs 3.2, 4.1b and 4.1c that would limit access capabilities but allow a wide range of treatments.
- Acres within IRAs having high or extreme uncharacteristic wildfire hazard ratings, high or extreme ratings for resistance to control, or high insect hazard ratings assigned to MPCs 1.2, 2.1, 2.2, 3.1, and 4.1a that would limit both the range of treatments and access capabilities.

**Issue Statement 3:** Forest Plan management strategies for Inventoried Roadless Areas may or may not be consistent with the direction established under the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

**Background to Issue 3**: A large number of public comments supported the adoption of management direction to protect IRAs that would be consistent with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Conversely, other comments were strongly opposed to the adoption of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

This issue was used to allocate management prescriptions by alternative and provide management direction for those prescriptions. It was also used to measure consistency with the Roadless Conservation Rule by alternative.

Issue Indicators for Issue 3: The indicators for this issue are:

- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPCs 1.2, 2.2, and 4.1a) that are consistent with direction established by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.
- Acres of IRAs assigned to management prescriptions (MPCs 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1b, 4.1c, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 6.2, 8.0)) that are NOT consistent with direction established by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule.

**Issue Statement 4:** Management strategies for recommended wilderness may affect recreation opportunities and experiences within recommended wilderness areas as well as the potential for wilderness designation of those areas.

**Background to Issue 4:** Public comments indicate that some people believe that allowing motorized uses within recommended wilderness is inconsistent with Forest Service stated management direction to maintain wilderness values, including opportunities for solitude and primitive experiences. Some feel that the noises created by motorized use as well as the use of mechanized equipment itself eliminates these opportunities and is thereby inconsistent with the management direction. Others also feel that allowing any form of mechanical transport including motorized uses, as well as mountain bicycling, creates the potential to establish a pattern of non-conforming use that builds a constituency for mechanized use of these areas, thereby threatening the chances for Wilderness designation. On the other side of this issue, some suggest that areas that are not designated as Wilderness should not be managed as Wilderness, while others voiced concern that there were already too many restrictions regulating motorized use of the Forests.

This issue was used in alternative development to address allowable uses within recommended wilderness areas related to mechanized uses. Alternatives 4 and 6 have a standard that prohibits mechanized use, while the other alternatives do not. The issue was also used to analyze effects from management strategies on mechanized use opportunities in recommended wilderness areas.

**Issue Indicator for Issue 4:** The indicator for this issue is mechanized use opportunities in recommended wilderness by alternative.

#### **Wilderness**

**Issue Statement:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect wilderness resources.

**Background to Issue:** No issues directly related to wilderness resources were identified during public comment periods or the Need for Change analysis process. Significant effects to wilderness areas are not expected under any alternative nor are effects expected to differ by alternative. However, compliance with federal laws governing wilderness is an important management concern. As a result, this issue was used solely to track general potential effects to the wilderness resource common to all alternatives.

#### Wild and Scenic Rivers

**Issue Statement:** Eligible rivers and their corridors may affect the Forest's ability to implement management activities.

**Background to Issue:** There was a need to conduct a new Wild and Scenic River eligibility study in order to incorporate changed conditions and new information since the previous plans were written. These changes included the listing of new species, changed watershed conditions, and new information from the ICBEMP Scientific Assessment. Forest personnel recognized that these changed conditions could influence whether a previously ineligible segment might now be considered potentially eligible, and vise versa. There was also a need to use an updated and consistent protocol for determining eligibility. In addition, suitability studies needed to be completed for the Secesh River, French, Big and Monumental Creeks on the Payette National Forest, and the South Fork Salmon River on the Boise and Payette National Forests. The need to conduct these suitability studies was generated as part of a litigation settlement between American Rivers, Inc. and the Payette National Forest.

Once river segments are determined eligible, they are managed to protect their free-flowing status and any identified Outstanding Remarkable Values (ORV). In some instances, this change in designation can restrict management activities. The restrictions vary according to how the river segment is designated: Wild, Scenic, or Recreational. The primary activities that can be affected are vegetation management, rangeland management, recreation development, hydroelectric development, mining, and road construction. In contrast, if the rivers are not determined to be eligible, their values could be affected by these activities in the future.

The Forest Plan Revision Record of Decision may recommend river segments as eligible or suitable for Wild and Scenic designation. While this issue did not drive alternative development, it was used to develop management direction and to analyze potential affects of Wild and Scenic River recommendations. This analysis displays the potential amount of river segments and river corridor area that could be affected by each recommendation, and describes the potential effects those recommendations could have on the river segments and other Forest resources.

**Issue Indicator:** The indicator for this issue is the amount of eligible river segments by classification that could affect, or be affected by, management activities. These segments are measured in both miles of river and acres of river corridor.

#### Socio-Economic Environment

**Issue Statement 1:** Forest Plan management strategies may have social and economic effects on local counties and communities.

**Background to Issue 1:** The socio-economic environment is not directly linked to any of the Need For Change topics for Forest Plan revision. However, nearly all Forest management activities have the potential to directly or indirectly affect the socio-economic environment (chiefly counties and communities). These activities are related to, or could be implemented under all alternatives. This analysis addresses county populations, lifestyles, attitudes, beliefs and values, social organization, land-use patterns, civil rights, community employment and income, and present net value.

This issue was used in development of alternatives in relation to economic stability and sustained yield concerns. This issue was also used to address the effects of management alternatives on community stability and lifestyles.

**Issue Indicators:** The indicators for this issue are potential effects on:

- County populations
- Community employment and income
- Lifestyles
- Attitudes, beliefs and values
- Social Organization
- Land-use patterns
- Civil Rights

**Issue Statement 2:** Forest Plan management strategies may affect the financial efficiency of operating the three National Forests in the Ecogroup.

**Background to Issue 2**: The financial efficiency of operating national forests is of great concern to the Forest Service and the public. There have been controversies recently that involve "below-cost" timber sales, "subsidized" grazing, and recreation facilities that are deteriorating due to lack of maintenance or replacement funding. Financial efficiency is measured by comparing estimated revenues or receipts to actual or estimated costs.

This issue was used to analyze the financial efficiency of the alternatives over a 50-year period.

**Issue Indicators :** The indicators for this issue are Present Net Value (PNV) and Revenue/Cost Ratio for the three Forests measured over a 50-year time frame.

# **Preliminary Issues Not Addressed in Detail**

### **Biological Diversity**

A number of concerns related to biological diversity were identified in the *Preliminary AMS* Summary (USDA Forest Service 1997). Because biodiversity generally encompasses all of life and its inter-connections, the Forests chose not to address this topic as a separate resource or issue in this EIS; however, information and analysis concerning key components of biodiversity are included in the resource sections of Chapter 3. The Air Quality and Smoke Management and Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources sections address the physical components of air, soil, and water. The Vegetation Diversity section describes biological components of forested and non-forested ecosystems; the Botanical Resources section addresses Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Candidate, and Sensitive plant species; the Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources section discusses effects to soil and hydrologic processes, water quality, riparian areas, and aquatic habitat and species of concern; the Terrestrial Habitat and Species section describes effects on wildlife habitat species of concern, habitat fragmentation, and disruption; the Vegetation Hazard and Fire Management sections address disturbance processes; and human dimension components of the ecosystem are analyzed in the Socio-economic Environment, Rangeland Resources, Timberland Resources, Recreation, Scenic Environment, Cultural Resources, Inventoried Roadless Areas, Roads, and Wilderness Areas sections. Changes in management direction for these resources have been included in the appropriate sections of the revised Forest Plans.

These key biological diversity components represent a range of resources considered under the Ecosystem Management framework of this document, and most resources represent some combination of biophysical and human dimension components. For example, the timber resource manages tree vegetation (biological) to provide goods and jobs (economic) to support local community values and lifestyles (social). The tree vegetation, in turn, depends on productive soils, oxygen, and water (physical) to grow and provide habitat for elk (biological) for people to view or hunt (social and economic). Indeed, most social and economic resources related to forest management are heavily dependent on the biophysical resources for long-term

sustainability. In other words, sustainable goods and services are the product of healthy, properly functioning ecosystems. Thus, forest management focuses on maintaining or restoring the biophysical components of ecosystems in order to sustain biological diversity, provide economic opportunities, and support social and cultural values.

## **Facilities**

The Forest Service operates and maintains administrative sites and facilities to manage the three Ecogroup Forests. No comments or issues were received on facilities during public comment periods. The Revision Team reviewed Forest Plan direction for facilities and made minor adjustments to ensure consistency across the Ecogroup; however, much of the direction was working and was therefore carried forward from the existing Plans. Management of these facilities under the different Forest Plan alternatives is not expected to change as a result of the Forest Plan revision process. Options for owning, leasing, acquiring, and disposing of facilities will be considered regardless of which Forest Plan alternative is selected for implementation.

### **Lands**

The *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997) identified a need to update land acquisition priorities based on changes in management emphasis since the original Plans were released. The updated priorities can be found in the Lands and Special Uses section of Chapter III in the revised Forest Plans.

#### **Minerals**

There was a concern raised over certain land allocations that could affect the amount of land available for mineral exploration and development, including oil and gas leasing. Areas such as Wild and Scenic Rivers and recommended wilderness could be withdrawn from mineral entry, and these areas could vary by alternative. However, withdrawal would not occur until after official designation, and there is no way to predict how much area Congress would officially designate, and therefore no way to accurately predict subsequent effects on the minerals programs. Updated management direction for Minerals and Geology Resources can be found in Chapter III of the revised Forest Plans.

#### **Research Natural Areas**

All but one of the RNAs proposed in the last round of Forest Planning have been established. The revised Forest Plans propose two small RNAs of around 1,100 acres each. Because of regulations governing RNAs, and because the majority of the RNAs do not have high commodity value or potential, effects to these areas are not expected to be significant or vary substantially by alternative. Updated information on RNAs can be found in Appendix I, and new management direction for RNAs can be found in Chapter III of the revised Forest Plans.

#### **Special Uses**

Effects to special uses are not expected to be significant or vary by alternative. The *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997) identified a need to strengthen special uses criteria in the Plans for making permit decisions, and provided communication and electronic site and utility corridor direction. This and other updated management direction can be found in the Lands and Special Uses section of Chapter III in the revised Forest Plans.

### **Cave Management**

The *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997) identified a need to include language in the Plans regarding cave management and the protection of cave resources. This language can be found in the Recreation Resources section of Chapter III in the Forest Plans. With this protection in place, the Forest Plan alternatives are not expected to have significant effects on cave resources.

## **Winter Recreation**

Public comments expressed concern over the rising level of winter recreation conflicts in a number of areas within the Ecogroup Forests. In most cases, these conflicts are between snowmobilers and skiers in developed ski areas and backcountry areas. Most of these conflicts can only be resolved by site-specific access determinations. Because the Forest Plan revision process analyzes and adjusts management direction at the programmatic level, resolution of these conflicts is beyond the scope of this revision. Site-specific winter access management will be addressed in separate travel management planning processes that will follow this revision. However, Forest-wide direction has been reviewed and updated in the Recreation section in Chapter III of the revised Forest Plans to provide a foundation for subsequent analysis and access management determinations. In some cases, specific management direction has also been included for appropriate management areas.

## **Travel Management**

Travel management and allocation of travel "use" zones are not addressed through this Forest Plan revision process. Travel management and Forest travel maps will be revised in a separate planning process. The Responsible Official elected not to address travel management in this revision process due to the broad array of localized issues with travel management that occurs at scales below a Forest Planning unit. Attempting to address specific travel management issues at the scale of this revision effort would not allow for the localized modifications needed to effectively meet resource, social, and economic issues known to exist. Forest Plan direction has been developed to provide a framework to address broader-scale issues requiring consistency across the planning unit, State or Regional scales for different types of allocations (MPCs).

## **Predator Control**

The *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997) identified a need to update direction in the revised Plans in response to a shift in predator control responsibilities. This updated direction can be found in the Wildlife Habitat section of Chapter III in the revised Forest Plans. Direction is the same for all action alternatives, and the alternatives would not have any significant effects on predator control.

### South Fork Salmon River

The South Fork Salmon River is identified in the original Boise and Payette Forest Plans as an area of special concern and management emphasis because of its important habitat for anadromous fish. Although this drainage is no less important today, the revised Plans do not have separate sections for the South Fork Salmon River for the following reasons: First, many of the South Fork habitat protection and improvement measures prescribed by the original Plans have now been accomplished; second, fish habitat protection in general has increased across the

Ecogroup to respond to the recent listing of species; third, taking a more holistic approach, the revised Plans recognize that the South Fork Salmon River is one of several aquatic strongholds that merit special protection methods, and these areas have been afforded a high level of protection and restoration emphasis at the Forest-wide and management area levels.

### **Management Area Boundaries and Direction**

The *Preliminary AMS Summary* (USDA Forest Service 1997) identified a need to define management area boundaries based on ecosystem components that tie to geographic features such as watersheds. This was accomplished during the revision process, and the results are provided in the new management areas of the revised Plans. Most management areas outside of designated areas such as wilderness or RNAs now follow watershed boundaries and can be better integrated into ecosystem-based planning.

# National or Regional Issues

## The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy

In January of 2003 a **Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU)** was entered into by and between the:

- USDA Forest Service, Regions 1, 4 and 6
- USDA Research, PNW and Rocky Mountain Stations
- USDI Bureau of Land Management, State Offices of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and Montana
- USDI Fish and Wildlife Service Region 1 and 6
- Environmental Protection Agency Region 10
- DOC (NOAA) National Marine Service NW Region.

The purpose of this MOU is to cooperatively implement the "*The Interior Columbia Basin Strategy*" to guide the amendment and revision of forest (FS) and resource management (BLM) plans and project implementation on public lands administered by the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management throughout the Interior Columbia Basin (USDA Forest Service et al. 2003). This strategy incorporates the scientific assessment information in, "*An Assessment of Ecosystem Components in the Interior Columbia Basin and Portions of the Klamath and Great Basins*" (Quigley and Arbelbide 1997a, b, c, d), the analyses supporting or developed as part of the ICBEMP, the "*Integrated Scientific Assessment for Ecosystem Management*" (ICBEMP 1996b) developed by the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) as guidance for implementation, and all reports generated by the ICBEMP project.

The *Implementation Strategy* document was developed around the key science findings and basin-wide issues developed in the ICBEMP Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS). Key findings contained in this strategy were considered and used in the development of the Proposed Action (Alternative 2) for Forest Plan revision, as well as other action alternative management strategies outlined in this FEIS (Chapter 2), including strategies for:

- Landscape Dynamics
- Terrestrial Species Habitat
- Aquatic and Riparian Habitat
- Social and Economics
- Tribal Governments
- Coordination with Other Management Efforts
- Adaptive Management

Chapter 3 of this FEIS contains more information under the biological and physical resource sections, as well as the Socio-Economic Environment and Tribal Rights and Interests sections.

## 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule

Effects on Inventoried Roadless Areas are described in the Inventoried Roadless Areas section of Chapter 3. This section has an Issue and Indicator designed to show potential consistency with the Roadless Area Conservation Rule by alternative. The range of alternatives described in Chapter 2 incorporates the range of alternatives and outcomes considered under the Roadless Area Conservation Final EIS (USDA Forest Service 2000). A detailed roadless area re-evaluation is presented in Appendix C to the EIS, and a description of characteristics for the Inventoried Roadless Areas within the Ecogroup Forests is presented in Appendix H.

## 2001 Road Management Final Rule and Administrative Policy

The final rule and administrative policy is referred to as the "Road Management Policy". The Road Management Policy was published in the Federal Register on January 12, 2001 (Federal Register Vol. 66, No. 9, 2001). It applies to existing and future roads on National Forest System lands. It emphasizes local, science-based decisions designed to maintain a road system that is safe, responsive to public needs, environmentally sound and affordable to manage. It also established official definitions regarding roads management terms.

The policy requires responsible officials to conduct a science-based roads analysis to help make better decisions on all new construction, reconstruction and decommissioning activities made after July 12, 2001. Currently, the August 1999 process entitled, *Roads Analysis: Informing Decision About Managing the National Forest Transportation System* (USDA Forest Service 1999), is the only approved analysis process.

FSM 7712.15 requires that "units that have begun revision or amendment of their forest plans but will not adopt the final revision or final amendment by July 12, 2001, must complete a roads analysis prior to adoption of the final plan or amendment". The Ecogroup Forests completed a Forest-scale Roads Analysis as part of the revision effort (refer to the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Roads Analysis contained in the project record). The information generated was used by the Responsible Official to make informed programmatic decisions needed to ensure that the road systems on the forest planning units were safe, responsive to public needs, environmentally sound, and affordable to manage.

## **Species Viability**

Effects on rare plant species are described in the Botanical Resources section of Chapter 3. Effects on wildlife and fish species of concern are disclosed in the Terrestrial Habitat and Species section, and the Soil, Water, Riparian, and Aquatic Resources section, respectively. In addition, the Biological Assessment and Biological Evaluations completed in support of Forest Plan revision contain more detailed assessments for threatened, endangered, proposed, candidate and Forest Service Region 4 sensitive species (*see the project record for the Biological Assessments and Biological Evaluations for Botanical, Aquatic, and Terrestrial species*).

Management direction has been strengthened to address botanical, aquatic, and terrestrial species viability in the revised Forest Plans. This direction takes a coarse filter and a fine filter approach. Vegetation and watershed restoration goals and objectives are emphasized at the coarse filter scale to provide diverse, connected, and sustainable habitats across the landscape. At the fine filter scale, standards and guidelines are designed to protect federally threatened, endangered, proposed, and candidate species, or Forest Service Intermountain Region 4 sensitive species.

In order to estimate the effects of each alternative management strategy presented in this FEIS on fish and wildlife populations, certain species present in the planning area were selected as Management Indicator Species (MIS). The reasons for selection of each selected species are described in detail in Appendix F. This appendix also includes the rationale for why species selected as MIS in the original Plans have not been carried into the revised Forest Plans. Chapter IV of the revised Forest Plans contains monitoring elements for population and habitat trends of MIS in cooperation with state and tribal fish and wildlife agencies.

The integration of habitat restoration and maintenance goals and objectives for species discussed above with management standards and guidelines for protection will contribute to the viability of native and desired non-native species on the Forests over the short and long term.

# National Fire Plan, Cohesive and Comprehensive Strategies, Healthy Forests Initiative -

The Departments of Agriculture (Forest Service) and Interior (NPS, USFWS, BLM) developed the National Fire Plan (USDA Forest Service 2000) in response to a Presidential request on how best to respond to the severe fire season of that year. The plan is a long-term, multi-faceted strategy designed to manage the impacts of wildland fire to communities and ecosystems, and to reduce wildfire risk. It focuses on improving fire preparedness, restoring and rehabilitating burned areas, reducing hazardous fuels, assisting communities, and research needs.

**Protecting People and Sustaining Resources in Fire-Adapted Ecosystems – A Cohesive Strategy** (USDA Forest Service 2000) – The Forest Service developed this strategy in 2000 to reduce fuel build-up in the West. The strategy establishes a framework to restore and maintain conditions in fire-adapted ecosystems where lower-intensity ground fires were a powerful force in shaping the make-up and structure of vegetative communities. The strategy identified Condition Class categories for these ecosystems, and prioritized areas for hazardous fuel treatments called for in the National Fire Plan. These priority areas include:

- Wildland Urban interface
- Municipal watersheds
- Threatened and endangered species habitat
- Maintenance of low risk Condition Class I areas.

**10-Year Comprehensive Strategy Implementation Plan, A Collaborative Approach for Reducing Wildland Fire Risks to Communities and the Environment** (USDA Forest Service et al. 2002) – Developed during 2001 in collaboration with governors and a broad range of stakeholders, this is a 10-year strategy to comprehensively manage wildfire, hazardous fuels, and ecosystem restoration on federal, state, tribal, and private lands. The strategy was designed to extend the concepts of the National Fire Plan and Cohesive Strategy into a broader and more collaborative effort. In 2002, the Implementation Plan for the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy was released. The plan identifies 22 specific tasks to achieve the four goals of the 10-year strategy; and specific performance measures for achievement. The plan emphasizes a collaborative, community-based approach to address wildfire-related issues, and translates the conceptual framework of the 10-year Comprehensive Strategy into specific actions.

**Healthy Forests - An Initiative for Wildfire Prevention and Stronger Communities** (Bush 2002) – Released in 2002, this Presidential initiative is designed to facilitate projects that reduce wildfire hazard and risk by making decisions in a more timely and efficient manner. In facilitating fuels reduction projects, the initiative would speed implementation of projects, improving implementation of the National Fire Plan and the 10-Year Comprehensive Strategy. It emphasizes using collaborative processes in identifying projects and priorities. This administrative proposal seeks to:

- Increase the use of Categorical Exclusions for fuel reduction projects,
- Streamline the appeals process within the existing appeals framework, and
- Streamline the Environmental Assessment documentation process.

**The Revised Forest Plans** - The revised Forest Plans address the wildfire hazard plans, strategies, and initiative described above by:

- Analyzing potential effects from wildfire and hazardous fuel conditions in the Vegetation Hazard and Fire Management sections of Chapter 3 in the FEIS,
- Revising Forest-wide Fire Management direction in Chapter III of the Forest Plan to incorporate national fire and fuel management objectives,
- Identifying National Fire Plan communities and wildland-urban interface areas within each appropriate Management Area in Chapter III of the Forest Plan, and
- Developing specific Management Area direction to prioritize treatment, suppression, prevention, and coordination efforts within and around National Fire Plan communities and wildland-urban interface areas.