

**File Code:** 1920**Date:** June 23, 2016**Route To:****Subject:** 2015 Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan Admin Change 1 - Monitoring Transition**To:** Letter to Files

## 2015 Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan Administrative Change #1

By my signature, I am adopting administrative changes to the 2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forest Land Management Plan (Forest Plan) monitoring program (Chapter 5) to comply with the 2012 Planning Rule, specifically the monitoring section at 36 CFR 219.12. These changes have been incorporated in the 2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forest Land Management Plan as Administrative Change #1.

Administrative changes are defined at 36 CFR 219.3(c) (2012 Planning Rule), are not Plan amendments or revisions, do not require the preparation of a document under Forest Service National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures, and may be made at any time following public notice (219.16(c)(6)).

Substantive changes to the monitoring program made outside a forest plan revision or amendment process require notice to the public of the intended changes and consideration of public comments (36 CFR 219.13(c)(1)). The proposed changes were released for a 30-day public comment period on March 25, 2016. One comment from the Boundary County Board of Commissioners was received requesting additional comment time to understand the nature of the change. Acting Deputy Forest Supervisor Shanda Dekome attended the Board of Commissioner meeting on May 2, 2016 to provide additional information and answer commissioners' questions. They indicated satisfaction with her clarification and had no further comments.

### Background

Anticipating the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule, the 2015 Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan (IPNF) revision effort developed a monitoring program that includes monitoring questions and indicators for seven of the eight elements National Forests are required to monitor at 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5). Therefore, no additions to the monitoring questions or indicators were required.

However, a change was required to address the requirement to monitor the status of focal species to assess ecological conditions 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(iii). As stated in the previous paragraph, anticipating this change would be needed, the landbird and macroinvertebrate assemblage management indicator species (MIS), and their associated monitoring question and indicators, were carefully selected for their suitability to meet this requirement.

Through this administrative change to the monitoring program, the landbird assemblage will be used as a focal species to indicate the integrity of terrestrial vegetation structure and function, and the aquatic macroinvertebrate assemblage will help indicate the integrity of aquatic habitat specifically, water quality. In Chapter 5, monitoring question MON-MIS-01 will be relabeled as



MON-FOC-01 and the indicator for the landbird assemblage will relabeled as MON-FOC-01-01. The indicator for the aquatic macroinvertebrate assemblage will be relabeled as MON-FOC-01-02. The only change to the monitoring question itself will be to remove MIS and add focal species (see table 2).

Elk were chosen as a third MIS because of their importance as a species commonly hunted and public concerns regarding elk security. The current MON-MIS-01 indicator measures elk security during the hunting season. The goal of Forest Service focal species monitoring is to act as indicators for the attributes of community composition, structure, connectivity or function, or factors that regulate them. Game species are generally not suitable as focal species because their populations are affected by factors other than habitat conditions, such as hunting pressure. Therefore, elk will not be transitioned to a focal species. However, we will continue to monitor elk security as a stand-alone (non-focal species) question, MON-WL-02 (only text change will be to remove the MIS reference), because of its importance as a commonly hunted species.

The bolded italicized text in table 1 indicates the administrative change to the plan monitoring program.

**Table 1. Administrative Change to the 2015 Idaho Panhandle NF Forest Plan Monitoring Program (from page 100 of the plan) Bolded and Italicized**

Resource	Monitoring Question	Reference to Forest Plan Direction	Indicator	Frequency of Measure/Precision
<b><i>Focal Species</i></b>	<b><i>MON-FOC-01: Are habitat trends for the <i>landbird assemblage and macroinvertebrate assemblage</i> consistent with the objectives?</i></b>	FW-OBJ-WL-02, FW-OBJ-WL-03, FW-GDL-WL-10, FW-DC-VEG-01, FW-DC-VEG-02, FW-DC-VEG-03, FW-DC-VEG-04, FW-DC-VEG-05, FW-DC-VEG-07, FW-DC-VEG-11, FW-OBJ-VEG-01, FW-STD-VEG-01, FW-GDL-VEG-01, FW-GDL-VEG-04, FW-GDL-VEG-05, FW-GDL-VEG-06, FW-DC-FIRE-03, FW-OBJ-AQH-02	<b><i>MON-FOC-01-01:</i></b> Landbird assemblage (insectivores): a) number of acres where planned ignitions were used to maintain/improve habitat; b) percentage of natural unplanned ignitions managed for the maintenance or restoration or fire adapted ecosystems  <b><i>MON-FOC-01-02:</i></b> Changes in River Invertebrate Prediction and Classification System (Observed/Effect model) score	Annual/Class A  Every 5 Years/Class A
<b><i>Wildlife</i></b>	<b><i>MON-WL-02: Are habitat trends for <i>elk</i> consistent with the objectives?</i></b>	<b><i>FW-GDL-WL-13</i></b>	<b><i>MON-WDL-01-02:</i></b> Elk: number of elk management units providing >30% security on NFS lands during the hunting season	Annual/Class A

## Implementation

The updated 2015 Idaho Panhandle Forest Plan Chapter 5 Monitoring Program is posted on the IPNF website at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/ipnf/landmanagement/planning> and is effective immediately. The updated Monitoring Guide reflects this transition and can be found on the forest web with the monitoring program.

Biennial monitoring evaluation reports document whether a change to the plan or change to the monitoring program is warranted based on new information, whether a new assessment may be needed, or whether there is no need for change at that time. (36 CFR 219.5). The first biennial monitoring evaluation is expected in 2018.



MARY FARNSWORTH  
Forest Supervisor

