

Idaho Panhandle National Forests Plan Monitoring Program Transition Information

Why are we transitioning to the 2012 Planning Rule requirements for monitoring?

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests 2015 Forest Plan monitoring program was developed under the 1982 Planning Rule. The [2012 Planning Rule](#), requires us to modify the monitoring program as needed to conform to the updated regulations.

What are the updated monitoring requirements in the 2012 Planning Rule?

The 2012 Planning Rule states a plan monitoring plan should contain at least one question in eight categories. [Chapter 30 of Forest Service Handbook 1909.12](#) includes an additional monitoring requirement to address social, economic, and cultural sustainability. All categories are addressed in the current monitoring program as described in the table below.

Table 1. 2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forests Monitoring Program Questions that Fulfill Requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule

2012 Planning Rule Monitoring Requirements at 36 CFR 219.12 (a)(5) and FSH 1909.12 Ch. 30	2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forests Monitoring Program MON-
(i) The status of select watershed conditions	FIRE-01, WTR-01 & 02, AQH-01, AR-02, TBR-02, MIN-01
(ii) The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems	FIRE-01 & 02, AQH-01, SOIL-01, FLS-01, MIS-01*, WL-01, AR-01, WLDN-01, TBR-02 & 03, MIN-01
(iii) The status of focal species to assess ecological conditions	MIS-01 *See the description following this table regarding the change from MIS to focal species.
(iv) The status of a select set of the ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern	FIRE-02, WTR-01, AQH-01, SOIL-01, FLS-01, WL-01, AR-02, WLDN-01
(v) The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives	AR-01, 02, 03, & 04, WLDN 01, CR-02
(vi) Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area	FIRE-01 & 02, WTR-01, AQH-01
(vii) Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities	FIRE-01 & 02, WTR 01 & 02, AQH-01, SOIL-01 & 02, FLS-01, WL-01, AR-01, 02, 03, & 04, WLDN-01, CR-01 & 02, AI-01 & 02, TBR-01, 02, & 03. MIN-01, SOC-01 & 02
(viii) The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land	FIRE-01, SOIL-01, AR-01 & 02, TBR-02 & 03, MIN-01
FSH 1909.12 (32.1) Social, economic, and cultural sustainability	SOC-01 & 02

As described in the preceding table, 36 CFR 219.12 (a)(5)(iii) requires monitoring of focal species to assess ecological conditions. Focal species are defined as “a small subset of species whose status provides an indicator of ecological integrity and ecosystem diversity. They provide insight into the effectiveness of a plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area. Focal species would be commonly selected on the basis of their functional role in ecosystems” (36 CFR 219.19 Definitions).

The 2015 Forest Plan monitoring program currently includes a question to monitor habitat trends for three management indicator species (MIS) at MON-MIS-01. These include (1) a landbird assemblage, (2) an aquatic macroinvertebrates assemblage, and (3) Rocky Mountain elk. The landbird assemblage was chosen to monitor progress towards the forestwide desired conditions for vegetation structure and function. The individual species that comprise the landbird assemblage were selected because they represented habitat components (e.g. openings, snags, large trees, mature stands, shrub/forb/grass understory) that would be expected to change during plan implementation. They are currently monitored through an agreement with the Integrated Monitoring in Bird Conservation Regions Program.

The aquatic macroinvertebrate assemblage was chosen to monitor the effectiveness of the forest plan’s aquatic conservation strategy and to monitor progress towards the forestwide desired conditions for aquatic habitat (water quality). They are useful and convenient indicators of the ecological health of a waterbody or river. They are almost always present and are easy to sample and identify. Aquatic macroinvertebrates can be used to reveal pollution problems and are ideal bio-indicators of water quality because they live in the water for all or most of their life. The PACFISH/INFISH Biological Opinion Implementation and Effectiveness Monitoring Team (PIBO monitoring crew), established by the Forest Service to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of that decision, collects and analyzes aquatic macroinvertebrate data annually. Data collection under PIBO started in 1998.

Anticipating this change for the 2012 Planning Rule would be needed, we carefully chose the landbird and macroinvertebrate assemblages as indicators of progress toward desired conditions and wrote their associated monitoring question accordingly. Through this administrative change to the monitoring program, MON-MIS-01 will be relabeled as MON-FOC-01 and the landbird assemblage will relabeled as MON-FOC-01-01. 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 2 indicates the administrative change to the plan monitoring program.

Table 2. Administrative Change to the 2015 Idaho Panhandle National Forests Forest Plan Monitoring Program (from page 101 of the plan) Bolded and Italicized

Resource	Monitoring Question	Reference to Forest Plan Direction	Indicator	Frequency of Measure/Precision
<i>Focal Species</i>	<i>MON-FOC-01:</i> Are habitat trends for <i>focal species</i> consistent with the objectives?	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	<i>MON-FOC-01-01:</i> 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 <i>MON-FOC-01-02:</i> Changes in KNF River Invertebrate Prediction and Classification System (Observed/Effect model) score	Annual/Class A Every 5 Years/Class A
Wildlife	<i>MON-WL-02:</i> Are habitat trends for <i>Rocky Mountain elk</i> consistent with the objectives?		<i>MON-WDL-01-02:</i> Elk: number of planning subunits providing >30% security and >50% security on NFS lands during the hunting season	Annual/Class A

What are species of conservation concern and what is the Idaho Panhandle NFs' proposal for these species?

Table 1 above also describes monitoring requirements for species of conservation concern in 36 CFR 219.12 (a)(5)(iv). The 2012 Planning Rule defines species of conservation concern as “a species, other than federally recognized threatened, endangered, proposed, or candidate species, that is known to occur in the plan area and for which the regional forester has determined that the best available scientific information indicates substantial concern about the species capability to persist over the long-term in the plan area” (36 CFR 219.9).

Since the Regional Forester has not yet identified species of conservation concern for the Idaho Panhandle National Forests, we cannot include a monitoring question for them at this time. We anticipate species selection and monitoring questions will be developed at a later date. Once these are identified we will engage the public for comment. As described in the table, the Idaho Panhandle National Forests monitoring program does include questions regarding the ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened species as required at 36 CFR 219.12 (a)(5)(iv).

What are other monitoring requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule?

Two additional requirements in the 2012 Planning Rule include the documentation of how the best available scientific information was used and that the plan monitoring program should be coordinated and integrated with relevant broader-scale monitoring strategies.

The Idaho Panhandle National Forests monitoring guide, a document that accompanies the monitoring program, provides detailed information on the monitoring questions, indicators, frequency and reliability, priority, data sources, and scientific literature citations specific to the varying monitoring questions. It will be updated as needed to reflect the changes made with this transition. Additional documentation of the use of best available science used to support the development of the 2015 Forest Plan, including the monitoring program, can be found in the Idaho Panhandle National Forests Final Record of Decision for the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Land Management Plan and the planning record.

The Forest Service Northern Regional Office is concurrently working on a broader-scale monitoring strategy, to identify monitoring items that are best addressed at geographic scale larger than a single National Forest or National Grassland. This broader scale strategy will be completed after this transition, but it will help monitor and track changes of broader scale issues that are still important to the Idaho Panhandle National Forests.

How will the proposed changes be incorporated into the 2015 Forest Plan monitoring program?

Because a plan monitoring program is not a plan component, it may be modified by an administrative change after notice to the public of the intended change and consideration of public comment (36 219.7(f) and 219.13(c)). We are providing this transition information to initiate a 30-day comment period on the proposed changes described in this document.

What do we need from you?

We would like your review of our proposal to use two of the selected MIS as focal species. After reviewing and addressing public comment as needed, the Forest Supervisor will document the administrative change in a letter and post both the letter and the updated monitoring program on the Idaho Panhandle National Forests website:

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/iphnf/landmanagement/planning>.

Your comments would be most helpful if received by April 25, 2016. Please send any comments to:

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