



File Code: 1900; 1920
Date: May 6, 2016

Dear Interested Party,

I am approving administrative changes to the forest plan monitoring programs associated with the Land and Resource Management Plan 2002 Revision for the White River National Forest ("White River Forest Plan") in order to comply with the Forest Service's 2012 planning rule.

Background

The 2012 planning rule, codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (36 CFR 219), guides forest plan monitoring across the Forest Service. All forest plan monitoring programs are required to conform to the planning rule by May 9, 2016. The strategy we used to identify the modifications focused on addressing the purpose of the forest plan monitoring program as described in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(1), which includes the need for monitoring information that will enable the responsible official to determine if a change in plan components is necessary.

Each forest plan monitoring program must contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following eight requirements, which are noted at 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5):

1. The status of select watershed conditions.
2. The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
3. The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 219.9.
4. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under 36 CFR 219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain a viable population of each species of conservation concern.¹
5. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
6. Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
7. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
8. The effects of each management system to determine that they do not substantially and permanently impair the productivity of the land (16 U.S.C. 1604(g)(3)(C)).

This administrative change is a modification to monitoring elements found in Chapter 4 of the White River Forest Plan. We retained those elements of the original monitoring programs that address the eight requirements listed above and developed new elements. The final "White



River Forest Plan: Updated Monitoring Plan” replaces Chapter 4 Monitoring and Evaluation of the White River Forest Plan Strategy Section of Chapter 4 of the White River Forest Plan (Pages 4-1 to 4-26). This update is available here: <http://www.fs.fed.us/nepa/fs-usda-pop.html?project=49221> and will be housed along with future monitoring reports on the forest’s Planning page: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/whiteriver/landmanagement/planning>.

Under the 2012 planning rule, the forest plan monitoring program will consist of only monitoring questions and associated indicators to evaluate if plan components are effective and appropriate and if management is effective in maintaining or achieving progress toward desired conditions and objectives for the plan area.

Additional information for implementing the forest plan monitoring program may be documented in a separate monitoring guide that would, for example, identify methods for data collection, how the data are stored, and responsibilities for managing monitoring information. The monitoring guide would not be part of the forest plan and could be changed as needed if, for example, more efficient methods of gathering data are developed.

The forest plan monitoring information will be evaluated every two years. The monitoring evaluation report must indicate whether or not a change to the plan, management activities, the monitoring program, or a new assessment, may be warranted based on the new information. The monitoring evaluation report must be used to inform adaptive management of the plan area. The expected publication date of the first biennial monitoring evaluation report is expected to be no later than two years from the date of this letter of approval.

Comments Received

The White River National Forest (White River) solicited comments for a 30 day comment period initiated by my letter on April 1, 2016. We received 4 written comment letters and oral comments from another group. All commenters were supportive of the effort to streamline and update our current monitoring plan. Commenters also identified some errors and formatting, which have been corrected in the final monitoring plan. We thank all of the commenters for their interest and input in our final Updated Monitoring Plan.

Some key issues raised in these comments are addressed as follows. Regarding our approach to monitoring aquatic species, WRNF aquatic biologists have a strong working relationship with CPW aquatic biologists and district wildlife managers. We strongly value this partnership and will continue to work together to monitor aquatic systems across the Forest and share monitoring data. We also look forward to incorporating their expertise into our monitoring protocols. Another comment identified other possible questions related to our timber program and we believe those issues are adequately addressed in our accomplishment reporting and will be addressed in the region’s Broad Scale Monitoring program.

The verbal comment we received highlighted the importance of capturing all of the progress towards bare ground restoration after management activities. Combined with comments from ski areas, I decided to expand this category to include all ground disturbance restoration to better determine the effectiveness of project design criteria in meeting our forest plan objectives. This

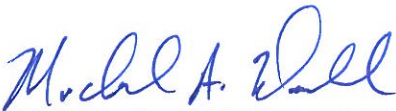
monitoring plan does not impose any new design features, but will give us more information as to whether our approaches to bare ground restoration are effective. All other issues raised by commenters were considered in adopting this final plan.

Approval of Monitoring Transition

Based on the proposed Monitoring Plan discussed in my April 1, 2016 letter requesting public comment and the comments that were received, and incorporating changes suggested by planning specialists at the Rocky Mountain Region office in Golden, Colorado, and an interdisciplinary team on the White River National Forest, I approve the administrative changes for the monitoring plan modification. The modified plan monitoring programs included in the forest plan now align with the 2012 planning rule and are found in Chapter 4 of the White River Forest Plan. Information specific to the monitoring realignment process can be found at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=49221>.

If you have questions about the administrative change or would like more information, please contact Matt Ehrman (mehrman@fs.fed.us) or 970-945-3212. Thank you for your interest in the management of the White River National Forest.

Sincerely,


for SCOTT G. FITZWILLIAMS
Forest Supervisor

cc: Matt Ehrman; Trey Schillie