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**Date:** MAR 28 2016

Dear Interested Forest User:

The 2012 planning rule, codified at 36 Code of Federal Regulations Part 219 (36 CFR 219), guides forest plan monitoring across the Forest Service. With this new planning rule, each Forest Plan Monitoring Program must now contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators addressing each of the following requirements from 36 CFR 219.12 (a)(5):

- i. The status of select watershed conditions.
- ii. The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.
- iii. The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under § 219.9.
- iv. The status of a select set of the ecological conditions required under § 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.
- v. The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.
- vi. Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.
- vii. Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.
- viii. 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)).

The planning rule further stipulates that all existing forest plans must be modified by May 9, 2016 to meet these eight requirements (see 36 CFR 219.12(c)(1)).

The Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests has conducted a review of the Monitoring Program associated with its Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) which was revised in January 2004. This review was to determine if the existing monitoring questions (attached) meet the eight requirements listed above, or if there is a need to change or add to the Monitoring Program. Attached is a crosswalk documentation of the compliance with 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5) and the 2004 Forest Plan existing monitoring questions. The current monitoring questions will continue to be documented in the Monitoring and Evaluation Report unless they are proposed for an administrative change (indicated below).

The review identified the need to make the following proposed changes to the Monitoring Program to meet the requirements found in 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5).



**Proposed Administrative Changes**

The proposed administrative change to the Forest Plan Monitoring Program are as follows:

Evaluation Reports

Monitoring Evaluation Reports will be conducted on a biennial schedule. It is anticipated that the next Monitoring Evaluation Report with these additions will be available by September 2018.

Climate Change

In meeting the requirement to monitor “measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area” (36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vi)), the following monitoring questions and indicators will be added to the Forest’s Monitoring Program:

Monitoring Question #20 – How has climate variability changed and how is it projected to change across the region?

Monitoring Question #21 – How is climate variability and change influencing the ecological, social, and economic conditions and contributions provided by plan areas in the region?

Monitoring Question #22 – What effects do national forests in the region have on a changing climate?

**Indicators and Procedures:**

These three monitoring questions will be addressed and evaluated through the Region 8 Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy, which the Forest will incorporate into the Forest Evaluation Reports. To see the indicators and procedures that will be used at the broader-scale for these monitoring questions, see the Region 8’s Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy at [www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning).

In addition to including monitoring questions 20, 21 and 22, the following monitoring questions from the Monitoring Program in the existing Forest Plan provide monitoring information to evaluate “other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.” These monitoring questions and their indicators are:

Monitoring Question	Indicators
<p>MQ 2: Are landscape-level and stand-level composition and structure of major forest communities within desirable ranges of variability?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Status and trend in forest coverage by major forest and woodland community type and successional stage (acres).</li> <li>- Prescribed fire and wildland by forest type, stand condition and season of burn (acres) compared to desired fire regimes.</li> <li>- Trend in hooded warbler occurrence in relationship to mature mesic deciduous forests.</li> <li>- Trend in red-cockaded woodpecker population in relationship to mature pine forests.</li> <li>- Trend in field sparrow occurrence in relationship to woodlands, savannas, and grasslands.</li> </ul>

Monitoring Question	Indicators
MQ 6: What are status and Trends of Forest Health Threats on the Chattahoochee/Oconee National Forests?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conditions and trends of forest fuels.</li> <li>- Hazardous fuels treated through wildland fire use, prescribed fire, and mechanical treatment.</li> <li>- Trends in the amount of air pollutants and their effects on forest vegetation, particularly ozone susceptible species.</li> <li>- Compliance with NAAQS air particulate emissions from NF lands.</li> <li>- Trends in native insect and disease effects.</li> <li>- Trends in the number of occurrences and/or acreage of selected non-native species?</li> <li>- Trends in forest composition and condition that have been associated with epidemic insects and diseases.</li> <li>- Effectiveness of treatments to eliminate or control invasive nonnative species?</li> </ul>

#### Social, Cultural and Economic Sustainability

In meeting the requirement to monitor plan contributions to the social, cultural, and economic sustainability of communities, which is a part of monitoring the progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives, including providing multiple use opportunities (see 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vii)), the following monitoring question and indicators will be added in to the Forest's Monitoring Program:

Monitoring Question #23 – What changes are occurring in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the areas influenced by national forests in the region?

#### Indicators and Procedures:

This monitoring question will be addressed and evaluated through the Region 8 Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy, which the Forest will incorporate into the Forest Evaluation Reports. To see the indicators and procedures that will be used at the broader-scale for this monitoring question, see the Region 8's Broader-Scale Monitoring Strategy at [www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning](http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/r8/landmanagement/planning).

In addition to including monitoring question 23, the following monitoring questions from the Monitoring Program in the existing Forest Plan provide information to evaluate social, cultural, and economic sustainability. The premise is that by producing or contributing to the ecosystem services that provide benefits to people and communities, social, cultural, and economic sustainability is enhanced. The following monitoring questions and indicators from the existing Monitoring Program in the Forest Plan provide information needed to evaluate ecosystem service benefits that are relevant to plan implementation:

Monitoring Question	Indicators
MQ 11: What is the status and trend of wilderness character?	Air Quality Related Values (AQRV).

Monitoring Question	Indicators
MQ 14: Are heritage sites being protected?	Heritage protection effectiveness, Heritage Resources Surveys.
MQ 17: How do actual outputs and services compare with projected?	Forest products production, Transportation infrastructure.

### Focal Species

Another new requirement is that our Monitoring Program must include monitoring questions and indicators on the status of a select set of focal species to assess ecological conditions (see 36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(iii)). A “focal species” is defined as a “species whose status permits inference to the integrity of the larger ecological system to which it belongs and provides meaningful information regarding the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring the ecological conditions to maintain the diversity of plant and animal communities in the plan area” (36 CFR 219.19). To address this, the following monitoring question will be added to the Forest’s Monitoring Program:

**Monitoring Question #24** – What is the status and trend of selected focal species on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests?

**Indicator and Procedures:**

These species, with the exception of brook trout, are being monitored under the existing Monitoring Program and they will continue to be monitored according to the protocols already established. However, the evaluation of the information gathered from the monitoring of these species will now be used within the context of evaluating the integrity of the ecological system the species is a part of, along with the effectiveness of the plan in maintaining or restoring those ecological conditions. Brook trout would be monitored following Region 8 Handbook for Monitoring and Guidance. Electrofishing is a widely accepted technique for both presence/absence sampling as well as for capture/recapture and other population estimation strategies. An upward trend in the number of populations and miles of occupied streams of Southern Appalachian brook trout are the desired changes.

The following table shows the species that are being identified as “focal species” for this Monitoring Program, along with ecological system/ecological conditions for which each focal species will serve as an indicator:

Focal Species	Ecological System/Conditions
Pine warbler*	Yellow pines, pine oak forested habitat
Chestnut-sided warbler*	Early successional forest habitat
Hooded warbler*	Mesic deciduous forested habitat
Prairie warbler*	Early successional forest habitat
Ovenbird*	Interior forest habitat
Acadian Flycatcher*	Riparian habitats
Pileated woodpecker*	Snags abundance
Brook trout	Streams with suitable water quality

Remarks: \*MIS (Management Indicator Species)

The following is a list of the existing species-related monitoring questions and indicators that will now serve to meet the requirement of monitoring species identified as “focal species”:

Monitoring Question	Indicators
MQ 2: Are landscape-level and stand-level composition and structure of major forest communities within desirable ranges of variability?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trend in forest coverage by major forest and woodland community and successional stage (acres).</li> <li>- Prescribed fire and wildland by forest type, stand condition and season of burn (acres) compared to desired fire regimes.</li> <li>- Trend in hooded warbler occurrence in relationship to mature mesic deciduous forests.</li> <li>- Trend in red-cockaded woodpecker population in relationship to mature pine forests.</li> <li>- Trend in field sparrow occurrence in relationship to woodlands, savannas, and grasslands.</li> </ul>
MQ 3: Are key successional stage habitats being provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trends in successional communities and abundance of key successional habitats (high-elevation early-successional habitats, old growth, mature forest interiors).</li> <li>- Trend in occurrence and habitats of several Management Indicator Species – prairie warbler, chestnut-sided warbler, Acadian flycatcher, ovenbird, scarlet tanager, Swainson’s warbler, pine warbler.</li> <li>- Trend in wildlife openings (acres).</li> <li>- Trend in existing and potential old growth by forest community class.</li> </ul>
MQ 4: How well are key terrestrial habitat attributes being provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Actions taken to protect and provide den trees, soft and hard mast, snags, and downed wood.</li> <li>- Trend in occurrence trends in occurrence and habitats of Management Indicator Species – pileated woodpecker.</li> </ul>

### **Administrative Change Process and Comment Period**

The 2012 Planning Rule allows for corrections or adjustments to Forest Plans using a process called “Administrative Changes.” “Administrative changes” as defined by 36 CFR 219.13(c) is “... any change to a plan that is not a plan amendment or revision. Administrative changes include corrections of clerical errors to any part of the plan, conformance of the plan to new statutory or regulatory requirements, or other content in the plan (219.7(f)).”

As is also described in 36 CFR 219.13(c)(1), “a substantive change to the monitoring program ... may be made only after notice to the public of the intended change and consideration of public comment.” This letter is to notify you of the proposed changes and to provide you with the

opportunity to comment on these proposed changes. Comments should be mailed/email to: Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests, Attn: Nelson E. Gonzalez-Sullow, 1755 Cleveland Hwy, Gainesville, GA 30501; email: [nelsongonzalezsullow@fs.fed.us](mailto:nelsongonzalezsullow@fs.fed.us) and will be accepted until April 29, 2016. This letter will also be posted on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=48853>.

This Administrative Change will become effective upon signature and being posted online at the Forest's website. Administrative changes are not subject to the objection process (36 CFR 219.50).

Should you have any comments or questions concerning this proposed change, please contact Nelson E. Gonzalez-Sullow, Forest Environmental Coordinator, at [nelsongonzalezsullow@fs.fed.us](mailto:nelsongonzalezsullow@fs.fed.us) or 770-297-3051.

Sincerely,



BETTY M. JEWETT  
Forest Supervisor

Enclosure

cc: Nelson Gonzalez-Sullow, Judy Toppins

**Table 1: Chattahoochee-Oconee Forest Plan Monitoring Transition**

<p><b>2012 Planning Rule transition requirement</b></p>	<p>The status of select watershed conditions.</p>	<p>The status of select ecological conditions including key characteristics of terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.</p>	<p>The status of focal species to assess the ecological conditions required under §219.9.</p>	<p>The status of select set of ecological conditions required under §219.9 to contribute to the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, conserve proposed and candidate species, and maintain viable population of each species of conservation concern.</p>	<p>The status of visitor use, visitor satisfaction, and progress toward meeting recreation objectives.</p>	<p>Measurable changes on the plan area related to climate change and other stressors that may be affecting the plan area.</p>	<p>Progress toward meeting the desired conditions and objectives in the plan, including for providing multiple use opportunities.</p>	<p>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)).</p>
<p><b>Regulation</b></p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(i)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(ii)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(iii)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(iv)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(v)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vi)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(vii)</p>	<p>36 CFR 219.12(a)(5)(viii)</p>
<p><b>2004 Forest Plan Compliance</b></p>	<p>Addressed in current Monitoring Program</p>	<p>Addressed in current Monitoring Program</p>	<p>Not addressed in current Monitoring Program</p>	<p>Species of conservation concern is not a transition requirement, and will be addressed in Forest Plan Revision</p>	<p>Addressed in current Monitoring Program</p>	<p>Forest monitoring of other stressors is addressed (indicated below) but monitoring of climate change is not</p>	<p>Forest monitoring of socio-economic indicators is not addressed</p>	<p>Addressed in current Monitoring Program</p>
<p><b>Proposed Monitoring Question</b></p>	<p>MQ 15 MQ 16</p>	<p>MQ 3 MQ 4 MQ 5 MQ 7 MQ 8</p>	<p>MQ 24</p>	<p>MQ 1 MQ 7</p>	<p>MQ 9 MQ 10 MQ 11 MQ 12 MQ 13</p>	<p>MQ 2 MQ 6</p>	<p>MQ 11 MQ 14 MQ 17 MQ 19</p>	<p>MQ 10 MQ 15 MQ 18</p>

### **Current Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Forest Plan Monitoring Questions**

- MQ1: Are rare ecological communities being protected, maintained, and restored?
- MQ2: Are landscape and stand-level composition, structure, and function of major forest communities within desirable ranges of variability?
- MQ3: Are key successional stage habitats being provided?
- MQ4: How well are key terrestrial habitat attributes being provided?
- MQ5: What is the status and trends of aquatic habitat conditions in relationship to aquatic communities?
- MQ6: What are status and trends of forest health threats on the forest?
- MQ7: What are the status and trends of federally-listed species and species with viability concerns on the forest?
- MQ8: What are the trends for demand species and their use?
- MQ9: Are high quality, nature-based recreation experiences provided, and what are the trends?
- MQ10: What are the status and trends of recreation use impacts on the environment?
- MQ11: What is the status and trend of wilderness character?
- MQ12: What are the status and trends of Wild and Scenic River conditions?
- MQ13: Are the scenery and recreation settings changing, and why?
- MQ14: Are heritage sites being protected?
- MQ15: Are watershed conditions being maintained (and where necessary restored) to provide resilient and stable conditions to support the quality and quantity of water necessary to protect ecological functions and support intended beneficial uses?
- MQ16: What are the conditions and trends of riparian area, wetland and floodplain functions and values?
- MQ17: How do actual outputs and services compare with projected? [36 CFR 219.12(k)]
- MQ18: Are silvicultural requirements of the Forest Plan being met?
- MQ19: Are Forest Plan objectives and standards applied and accomplishing their intended purpose?

### **Proposed Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests Forest Plan Monitoring Questions**

- MQ20 – How has climate variability changed and how is it projected to change across the region?
- MQ 21 – How is climate variability and change influencing the ecological, social, and economic conditions and contributions provided by plan areas in the region?
- MQ 22 – What effects do national forests in the region have on a changing climate?
- MQ 23 – What changes are occurring in the social, cultural, and economic conditions in the areas influenced by national forests in the region?
- MQ 24: What is the status and trend of selected focal species on the Chattahoochee-Oconee National Forests?