Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

The Process to Develop a Plan

Understanding the Land Management Planning Process

April 2026

What are Land Management Plans

- Strategic and **programmatic** guidance and management direction
  - Does not commit to specific actions
  - Establishes sideboards or constraints within which the Forest Service makes project decisions
  - Provides long-term vision & strategy to guide future on-the-ground activities
- Tells the "*what*" and the "*why,*" not the "*how*"
- Does not repeat law, regulation, or policy
- Directs the Forest Service on the work they do, not the public

Forest Service photos left to right: American Bumblebee; Windmill silhouetted in a sunset; Point of Rocks

The Process For How We Develop the Plan

Plan development starts with a vision and then sharing how you will achieve that vision with your strategy and tactics

Compile our body of knowledge
- Assessment
- Public collaboration and best available science
- Biannual monitoring
- Law, regulation, and policy

What change is needed from the current plan
- Purpose and need

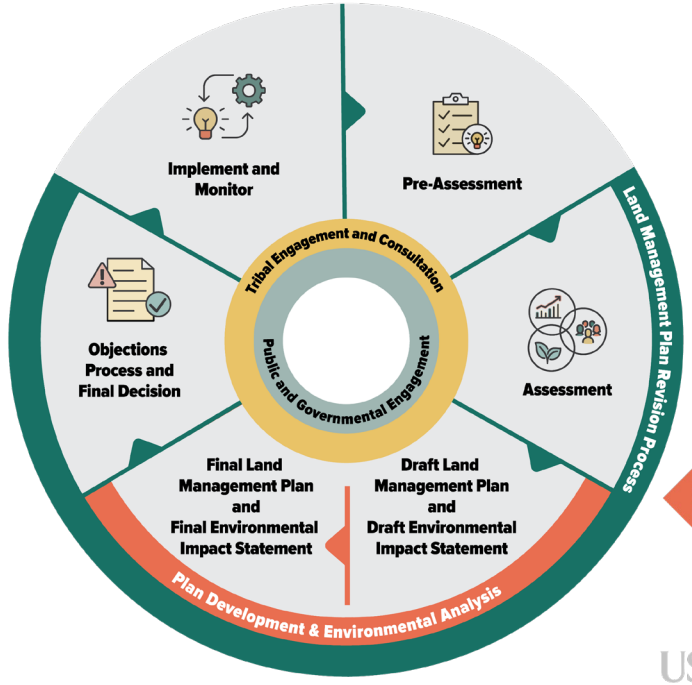
WE ARE HERE

Plan vision
- Land allocations (area-wide, geographic or management areas, designated areas, etc.)
- For each of the different topic areas in the plan
  - Vision (desired conditions)
  - Roles and contributions (focus)
  - Goals (optional)

Plan strategy
- Objectives
- Suitability
- Priority watersheds
- Proposed and possible actions
- Partnership opportunities and management approaches (optional)

Plan tactics
- Standards
- Guidelines

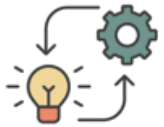
Alternatives and monitoring program
- Alternative management approaches
- Plan monitoring program indicators



Role of the Public to Develop the Plan and Analysis

The assessment for the plan

Public input, best available science, and other local documentation



Biennial monitoring reports

Laws, regulations, or policies

Collaborative plan development with the public

Tribal consultation on the plan

Notice to initiate plan development and the intent to complete an EIS*

Optional public comment period on the purpose and need for the revision or amendment and the preliminary plan

Draft Plan

and Draft EIS

Notice of availability of the draft plan and draft EIS*

90-day public comment period on the plan and draft environmental impact statement

Revised Plan and Draft Record of Decision

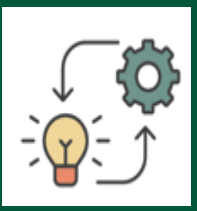
and Final EIS

Notice of availability of the final plan and final EIS *

Notice of opportunity to object*

Objection period on plan and draft record of decision

Notice of plan approval*



Project implementation using the plan and public input and implement the plan monitoring program

*Federal Register Notice

Contents of a Land Management Plan

- Introduction
  - –Plan area and background
- Plan Components
  - –Desired conditions (vision)
  - –Goals (optional)
  - –Objectives
  - –Standards and guidelines
  - –Suitability
- Required Plan Content

Other Required Plan Content

Distinctive roles and contributions

- Summarizes what makes the landscape and surrounding communities unique and why the plan area matters

Priority watersheds

- Identifies watersheds that need focused attention or restoration due to their condition or importance

Management areas and/or geographic areas

- Defines areas where specific plan components apply, each containing at least one distinguishing desired condition or plan component
- Serves as the “container” for applying direction, whether area-wide or area-specific

Proposed and possible actions

- Provides general, high-level actions used to support effects analysis
- Includes broad estimates (for example, timber suitability numbers) that help assess potential impacts

Plan monitoring program

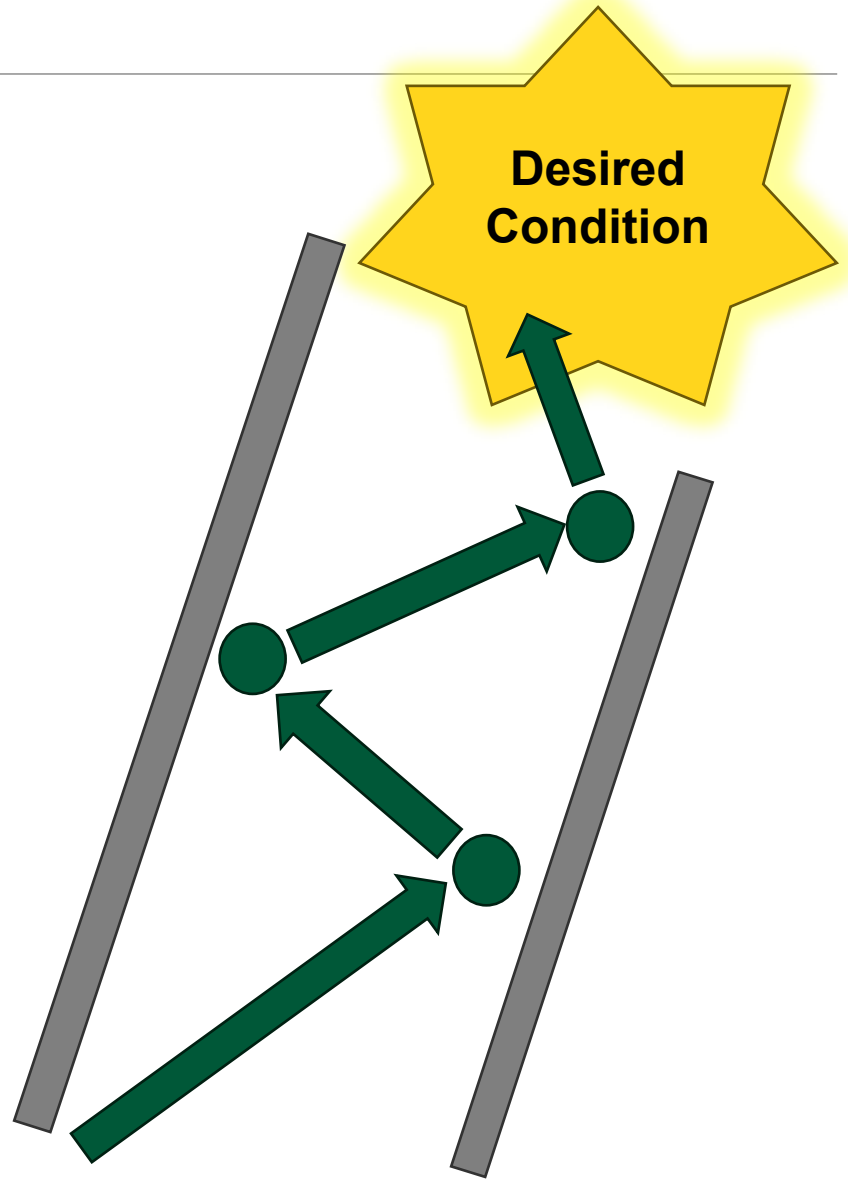
- Outlines regular measurements to track progress toward desired conditions, evaluate whether the plan is working, and guide adjustments if needed

Plan Components Must

- Align with **Agency authorities**, the **capability of the land**, and the forest/grassland's **fiscal capacity**
- Be clear, unambiguous, and have well-defined geographic applicability
- **Guide** and **limit** Forest Service decision-making on projects and activities, but **do not commit the Forest Service to act**
- Be enforced through project administration and monitor implementation on a biennial basis
- Be informed by the assessment, monitoring, public participation, and the best available scientific information—and do not restate existing laws or regulations
- Work together without conflict

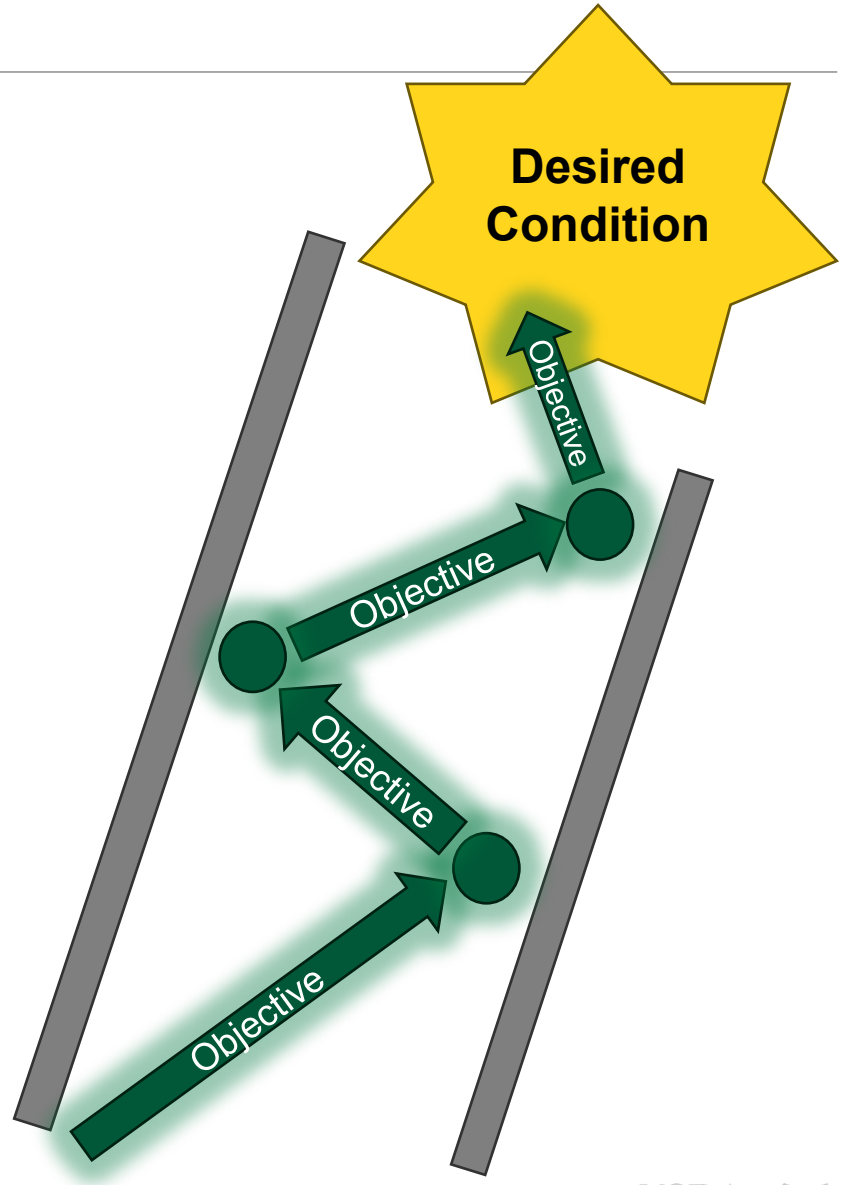
Desired Conditions

- **Define** the specific **social, economic, cultural, and ecological characteristics** the plan area should **exhibit in the future**, forming the foundation for all other plan components
- Be achievable, describe conditions within the national forest, and be specific enough to evaluate progress without including completion dates
- Support ecological integrity, reflect desired multiple uses and ecosystem services, and be written clearly enough that a layperson can visualize the envisioned future conditions.
- Articulate a vision of how the plan area (area-wide, management area-wide, geographic area-wide) should look and function, often expressed as a range to reflect dynamic ecosystems and changing social or economic needs
- Remain consistent across topic areas within the plan, using qualifiers where needed to avoid conflicts across different geographic or management areas



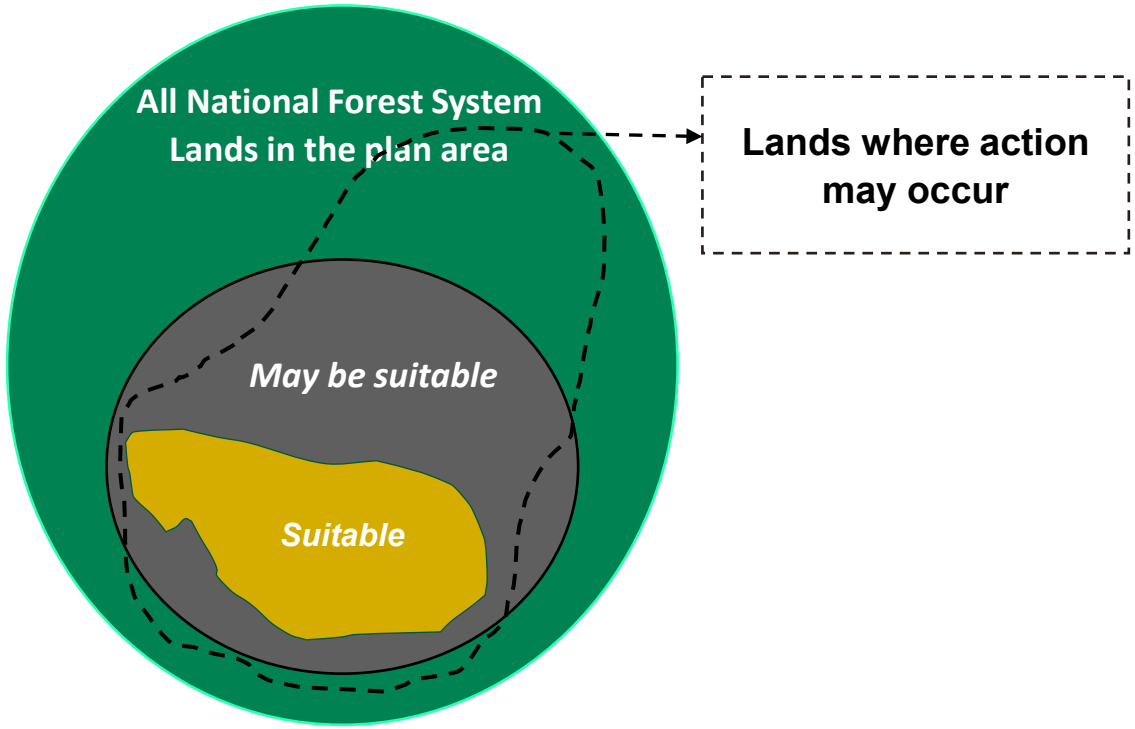
Objectives

- Objectives are concise, measurable, time-specific statements that define the expected rate of progress toward desired conditions and must be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets
- They function as milestones on the journey toward desired conditions, indicating when key steps should be achieved
- Every objective must be realistic, measurable, and tied to a specific timeframe
- Examples include quantifiable, time-bound statements such as “10,000 acres thinned to 60 sq. ft/acre within 5 years” or recurring timelines like “by 2020 and every 3 years thereafter”



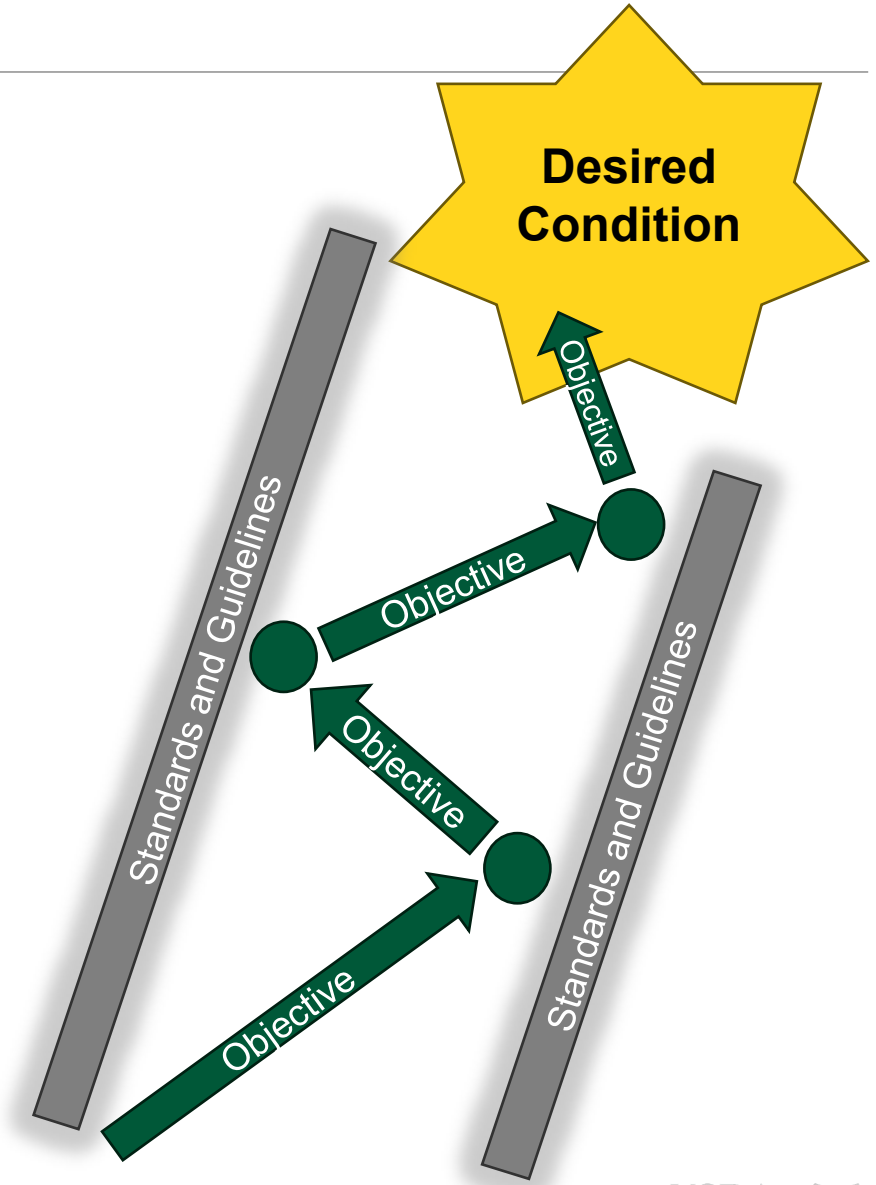
Suitability

- Identifies which lands are appropriate or not appropriate for specific uses based on desired conditions, historic uses, and issues raised during planning
- Every plan must determine which lands are suited and not suited for timber production (required by § 219.11)
- The responsible official has discretion over which additional uses to evaluate for suitability, how many determinations to make, and which areas to apply them to
- Identifying land as “suitable” for a use does not commit the Forest Service to authorize that use
- Identifying land as “not suitable” for a use prohibits the Forest Service from authorizing it, though activities not requiring Forest Service authorization may still occur



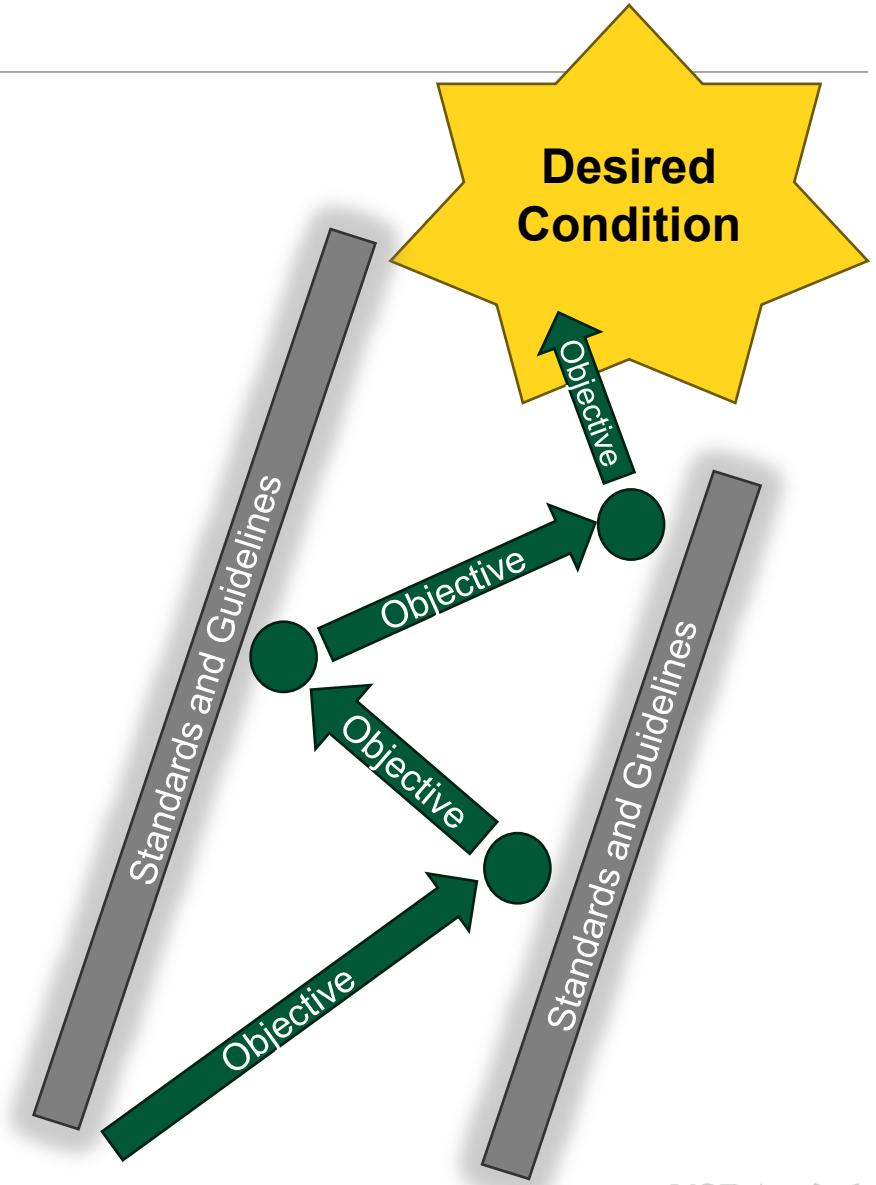
Standards

- Are **mandatory constraints** on projects and activities, used to ensure progress toward desired conditions, avoid undesirable effects, or meet legal requirements
- Restrict actions by prohibiting them, setting specific limits, or prescribing how actions must be carried out
- Apply directly to project-level decisions
- Must be clear, specific, and unambiguous—avoiding vague terms like “reduce,” “minimize,” or “mitigate” unless quantified
- Avoid language that only requires “considering,” “encouraging,” or specifying who may act, since these do not create enforceable constraints



Guidelines

- Are constraints on project decisions that allow flexibility, **as long as the underlying purpose** of the guideline is **still achieved**
- Help move conditions toward desired outcomes, avoid or reduce undesirable effects, and meet legal requirements
- Must be explicitly stated so that acceptable alternative ways to meet the guideline can be determined
- Differ from standards by allowing departures when the intent can still be met through other means



Connecting Need to Change Statements to Desired Conditions

Need to Change Statement: There is a need for plan direction that addresses the management of habitat for species of conservation concern, such as the lesser prairie chicken.

- **Possible Desired Condition:** Habitats and ecological processes support and maintain viable populations of species of conservation concern specific to those ecosystems.

Need to Change Statement: The current plan does not adequately address the growing challenges of invasive species such as tamarisk and Russian thistle, on species diversity and habitat and forage quality and abundance.

- **Possible Desired Condition:** Invasive species populations are stable or declining. Areas of known populations are included in a monitoring and invasive species management plan.

Need to Change Statement: Pinon and juniper trees are expanding into the shortgrass prairie, and there is no emphasis or targeted management strategy in the 1984 plan for woody encroachment in grassland.

- **Possible Desired Condition:** Juniper woodlands are found primarily in areas of rugged topography and rocky soils and extend over much of the mesas and foot slopes adding to species diversity across the grasslands. These woodlands would be intermixed with mid-height woody shrublands and understory of native perennial shrubs, grasses, and forbs. Fire disturbances and targeted tree removal are used to control encroachment into shortgrass prairie. Management is consistent with the strategy in those ecosystems or management areas.

Example of Information in Each Type of Plan Component

Need to Change Statement

- The current plan does not adequately address the growing challenges of invasive species such as tamarisk and Russian thistle, on species diversity and habitat and forage quality and abundance.

Desired Condition

- Invasive species populations are stable or declining. Areas of known populations are included in a monitoring and invasive species management plan.

Objective

- A minimum of 6,000 acres of tamarisk would be treated.

Standard

- All projects or work in riparian corridors requires a pre-work survey to identify if tamarisk is present and follow up monitoring and treatments for up to 2-years after completion.

Guideline

- If chemical application is necessary near human developments (campgrounds, buildings, etc.) or ecologically sensitive habitat (e.g., at-risk species), techniques should be applied to minimize negative effects (e.g., chemical-free buffers and spot treatments).

Example on How Plan Components Work Together

The following example plan components have been compiled to illustrate what a set of plan components could look like.

Need to Change: There is a need for plan direction that maintains open space and dark skies in the plan area.

Scenery Distinctive Roles and Contributions

Scenery is a resource that visitors value and enjoy. It also provides an integral and important sense-of-place backdrop, setting, and character-defining element for adjacent communities, residential areas, and travelways. The scenic resource experience also represents a key ecosystem service. Scenic attractiveness as defined in the Forest Service Scenery Management System has three levels: distinctive, typical, and indistinct. Distinctive scenic attractiveness is defined by areas where landforms, vegetation patterns, water characteristics, and cultural features combine to provide unusual and outstanding scenic qualities.

Scenic character is a combination of the physical, biological, and cultural images that give an area its scenic identity and contribute to its sense of place. Desired scenic character is the appearance of the landscape as having been retained or created over time, recognizing the dynamic nature of landscapes and that scenery changes over time as the landscape mosaic changes.

Scenery Desired Conditions

1. The natural, historic, and cultural features of landscapes that provide “sense of place” would continue to represent the unique values. The scenic value of historic and cultural properties and resources would be preserved. Landscapes in the plan area would have vegetation patterns and species mixes as described in the desired conditions sections for the four primary ecosystems. Moderate or high scenic integrity of the plan area would be common, while areas of low scenic integrity would move toward moderate or high scenic integrity. Existing and new human-made features and facilities and other landscape alterations would complement, or at least would not detract from, desired landscape character and scenic integrity.
2. Utility lines and other permitted infrastructure have minimal impacts on the scenic resources of the area by harmonizing with the landscape. Large vertical structures do not dominate the views from high scenic integrity areas and developed recreation sites.

Example on How Plan Components Work Together (Cont.)

The following example plan components have been compiled to illustrate what a set of plan components could look like.

Scenery Objectives

None

(Note that you do not always need to have every type of plan component to meet a desired condition.)

Scenery Standards

1. Scenery management, scenic character, and scenery values are integrated into the design, planning, and implementation of all resource management decisions.
2. Management actions that would result in a scenic integrity level of unacceptably low are prohibited in all land management areas.
3. Projects in foreground areas of scenic byways, national scenic trails, or designated wild and scenic rivers shall be designed to meet the scenic integrity objective of at least high.

Scenery Guidelines

1. Mining activities should incorporate reclamation measures that reduce visual contrasts with the surrounding landscapes. Mitigation measures, including recontouring topography and revegetation of bare sites where necessary, should be utilized to move areas impacted by mining activities to the long-term scenic integrity objectives of that area.
2. To minimize impacts to valued scenic attributes and character, management activities should be designed to complement surrounding scenic character through line, form, color, texture, size, shape, edge effect, and patterns of natural vegetation openings.

Example on How Plan Components Work Together (Cont.)

The following example plan components have been compiled to illustrate what a set of plan components could look like.

Need to Change: Current plan direction is inadequate to address expansion and encroachment of invasive species.

Invasive Species Distinctive Roles and Contributions

Invasive species are one of the most immediate and disruptive threats to ecosystem function and integrity. Invasive species addressed in this section include all taxa, including plants; vertebrates; invertebrates; and pathogens. Invasive species management priorities, objectives, and activities are collaborative through participation in several organized state, county, and nonprofit partnerships. Plan components are designed to support ongoing invasive treatment efforts and are complementary to sections that provide ecosystem level components for ecosystem integrity and species diversity. Plan components related to invasive species may be found in other sections of the plan.

Invasive Species Desired Conditions

1. Native plants are the primary vegetation on the landscape, with invasive plants kept to very low levels.
2. Aquatic ecosystems remain free of invasive species.
3. Invasive species and pathogens are decreasing in extent and impact, or at least not spreading.
4. Feral hogs are absent.
5. No new invasive plant species become established in terrestrial or aquatic ecosystems.
6. Terrestrial and riparian ecosystems can maintain or recover their natural functions and structure after disturbance, even when threatened by invasive plants.

Example on How Plan Components Work Together (Cont.)

The following example plan components have been compiled from multiple revisions to illustrate what a set of plan components could look like.

Invasive Species Objectives

1. Integrated weed management measures would be employed annually.
2. A minimum of 500 acres of nonnative invasive plant species (other than tamarisk) would be treated.
3. A minimum of 6,000 acres of tamarisk (a species of interest) would be treated.

Invasive Species Standards

1. Projects or activities that would authorize the use of forage products, seeds, or other revegetation or erosion control materials must use products that are certified noxious weed seed free.

Invasive Species Guidelines

1. If chemical application is necessary near human developments (e.g., developed recreation sites) or ecologically sensitive habitat (e.g., at-risk species and riparian areas), techniques should be applied to minimize negative effects (e.g., chemical-free buffers and spot treatments).
2. When drafting water from streams or other water bodies, measures should be taken to prevent the spread of parasites, pathogens (e.g., fungi, bacteria, protozoa), and invasive species.
3. Treatment approaches should use integrated pest management practices to treat noxious and nonnative invasive species. These practices include mechanical or physical, cultural, biological, and chemical control.

What's Next

- Upcoming in-person workshops will start the development of desired conditions, building off what has been identified as needing to change from the 1984 plan.
  - April 20, 2026, 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. CST
    Elkhart City Hall, 433 Morton St., Elkhart, KS 67950
  - April 21, 2026, 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. MST
    Baca County Fairgrounds, Minnick Building, 28500 County Road 24.6, Springfield, CO 81703
  - April 22, 2026, 5:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m. MST
    Otero Community College, Student Center Meeting Room, 2001 San Juan Ave., La Junta, CO 81050
- As we move through this planning process, our public engagement webinars and workshops will continue to build off the last interactions.
- Keep in touch by signing up for our email mailing list and checking out our plan revision webpage.

Workshop attendance confirmation: Confirmation is not required to attend but needed for planning purposes. Please fill out this short form.

Need something to help you prepare for the in-person workshops? Use this prep sheet found on our plan revision webpage.

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