



Best Available Scientific Information (BASI) in the Plan Revision Process

What is BASI, and how does the Forest Service identify it?

Background

The 2012 Planning Rule is rooted in using the best available scientific information.

“The Responsible Official shall identify and use BASI to inform the planning process and document how BASI was determined to be accurate, reliable, and relevant to issues being considered. The BASI includes relevant ecological, social, and economic information. Use of BASI must be documented for the assessment, the plan decision, and the monitoring program.” (FSH 1909.12, 07.1)

What is BASI?

BASI can include:

- Materials developed using the scientific method, which includes clearly stated questions, well-designed investigations and logically analyzed results, documented clearly and subjected to peer review.
- Information from analyses of data obtained from a local area, or studies to address a specific question in one area.
- The result of expert opinion, panel consensus, or observations, as long as the responsible official has a reasonable basis for relying on that scientific information as the best available (77 FR 21192).

BASI is determined based on the following criteria: accuracy, reliability, and relevancy.

Accurate

The scientific information must estimate, identify, or describe the true condition of its subject matter.

Reliable

Reliability reflects how appropriately scientific methods have been applied and how consistent the resulting information is with established scientific principles.

Relevant

The information must pertain to the issues under consideration at spatial and temporal scales appropriate to the plan area and to a land management plan.

How does the Forest Service determine BASI?

The Responsible Official may recognize multiple sources and possibly conflicting scientific information as BASI where a clear scientific consensus does not exist. The Responsible Official does not have to identify a single source of scientific information that is “best” as BASI for a specific subject.

The planning team and Responsible Official reviews, identifies, and uses BASI throughout the process. The planning team will summarize the BASI used in planning documents, such as the assessment and the environmental impact statement. BASI will be cited and synthesized and listed in bibliographies. Ultimately, the plan revision process will rely on the body of BASI to inform decision making.

Information submitted by the public as BASI will be carefully reviewed against the criteria described above and incorporated when possible. This review and determination process will also be documented in the planning record and in the response to comments for the environmental impact statement.

How is BASI used in the Planning Process?

Assessment Phase

Early in the assessment phase the Responsible Official shall provide opportunities for public and governmental participation, inviting submissions of information, including scientific information, that may be relevant to the planning process. The Responsible Official also provides opportunity for public and governmental participation to develop a shared understanding of the BASI and to make clear how the BASI was identified for the assessment.

Planning Phase

The planning phase begins by making a preliminary identification of the need to change the plan as informed by the assessment. The Responsible Official continues to engage governments and the public on the determination and use of BASI, as part of the public and governmental participation opportunities provided in the early stages of the planning process. Governments and the public may submit any additional or new scientific information for consideration in the planning process, and the Responsible Official shall determine whether any such info is the BASI.

Monitoring Phase

BASI must be used to inform the development of the monitoring program.

How can the public provide BASI for the Forest Service to consider?

Information received by the public is important in the identification of BASI to inform the planning process. The Forest Service encourages the public to share information they feel meets the criteria of

BASI that the Responsible Official and team need to consider in the planning process.

BASI can be most efficiently incorporated in planning documents when it submitted during a comment period associated with the assessment phase and the planning phase. However, open information exchange is encouraged at any time.

When providing BASI materials, the team will best be able to understand the input if the commenter provides context, rationale, or explanation about how they feel the information should be used in the process or analysis. Attachments of materials in a PDF format or a working website link is helpful, or if not available, providing a full citation so that the team can locate the information being provided.

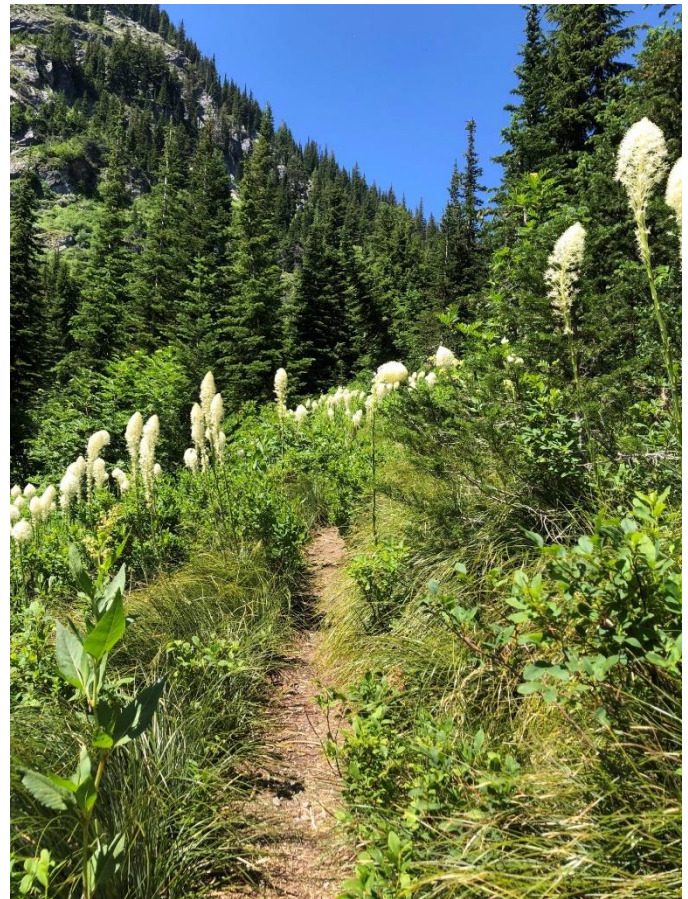


Figure 1. Ward Creek Trail, Lolo National Forest. Photo courtesy of Kate Jerman, USDA Forest Service