



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Rocky Mountain Region / Black Hills National Forest

October 2023

Black Hills National Forest

Final Forest Assessment:

Land Status, Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns



Black Hills National Forest

In accordance with Federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, the USDA, its Agencies, offices, and employees, and institutions participating in or administering USDA programs are prohibited from discriminating based on race, color, national origin, religion, sex, gender identity (including gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, marital status, family/parental status, income derived from a public assistance program, political beliefs, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity, in any program or activity conducted or funded by USDA (not all bases apply to all programs). Remedies and complaint filing deadlines vary by program or incident.

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible Agency or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. Additionally, program information may be made available in languages other than English.

To file a program discrimination complaint, complete the USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form, AD-3027, found online at http://www.ascr.usda.gov/complaint_filing_cust.html and at any USDA office or write a letter addressed to USDA and provide in the letter all of the information requested in the form. To request a copy of the complaint form, call (866) 632-9992. Submit your completed form or letter to USDA by: (1) mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, SW, Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; (2) fax: (202) 690-7442; or (3) email: program.intake@usda.gov (link sends e-mail).

USDA is an equal opportunity provider, employer, and lender.

Contents

Chapter 1. Introduction	1
<i>Resource Overview</i>	1
Chapter 2. Resource Assessment	2
<i>Importance</i>	2
<i>Current Condition</i>	2
Land Status and Ownership	2
Land Access	3
Land Use.....	5
<i>Trends</i>	5
Land Status and Ownership Trends	5
Access Trends	6
Use Trends	7
<i>Management</i>	7
Land Ownership Influence	7
Access Influence.....	7
<i>Actions of Others</i>	8
Management Coordination Opportunities	8
Chapter 3. Conclusions	9
<i>Environmental Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns</i>	9
<i>Economic Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns</i>	9
<i>Social Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns</i>	9
Landownership Adjustment and Rights-of Way Acquisition	11
Non-Recreation Special Use Management	11
Issues in the Broader Landscape	11
References Cited	13
Appendix A. Map	15

List of Tables

Table 1. Acres of non-NFS and NFS lands within the plan area	3
Table 2. Acreage of conservation easements	3
Table 3. Miles of road by jurisdiction	4
Table 4. Land and Water Conservation Fund project recent acquisitions	6

Chapter 1. Introduction

The Black Hills National Forest is managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The mission of the USFS is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The National Forest Management Act requires all national forests to develop a land and resource management plan (forest plan) to guide management actions and decisions. The current forest plan for the Black Hills National Forest was approved in 1997 and has been amended twice, in 2001 and 2005. The National Forest Management Act requires that these forest plans be periodically updated. To revise the current forest plan, the Black Hills National Forest has identified and evaluated existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability and how those conditions relate to management direction in the forest plan. This final assessment report documents findings for aquatic, riparian, and groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Resource Overview

This document is an assessment of the current known land status, ownership, use, and access patterns in the Black Hills National Forest, or the "plan area" and how its management may influence land use and access in the plan area and beyond.

Chapter 2. Resource Assessment

Importance

The primary key issue identified for land status and ownership, use, and access patterns within the plan area is prioritization of lands for acquisition or disposal to best meet the needs of the forest and adjacent communities within budget constraints. Other key issues include balancing Multiple Use priorities, accessing Black Hills National Forest lands with increasing development on private inholdings, ensuring that non-recreational special uses minimally encumber the forest, allowing important economic development, and resolving trespasses and encroachments in the plan area. Related issues identified in the previous forest plan include:

- Timber management,
- Off-highway vehicle (OHV) management,
- Fire hazards and communities at risk,
- Social and economic sustainability for local communities (including job opportunities/workforce advancement),
- Forest access, including access to sacred and cultural sites,
- Grazing, rangeland, and forage management, and
- Mining (and impacts).

Current Condition

Land Status and Ownership

Land status is the zoning for private lands and formal management status of public lands, while land ownership is the basic pattern of public and private ownership of both surface and subsurface estates. The Black Hills National Forest contains numerous private, residential, and tourism-related inholdings (table 1) and is one of the most developed forested areas in the nation. Of the more than 1.5 million acres within the administrative boundary of the national forest, approximately 286,000 acres are in private, state, or other federal agency ownership. Lands managed by the USFS are referred to as National Forest System (NFS) lands. The towns of Custer, Hill City, Keystone, Lead, and Deadwood are all entirely contained within the administrative forest boundary. The area surrounding Lead and Deadwood, however, was exempted from the Black Hills National Forest when it was established in 1905 due to the abundance of mining claims and private ownership. All of the federal land within this "exemption area" is managed by the BLM. Other federal and state lands within Black Hills National Forest include Custer State Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Wind Cave National Park, Mickelson Trail, and Jewel Cave National Monument.

Black Hills National Forest is managed by four ranger districts (RD). Bearlodge RD, headquartered in Sundance, Wyoming, encompasses over 200,000 acres in the northern portion of the Black Hills National Forest and is the only RD of the Black Hills National Forest located in Wyoming. The 375,000-acre Northern Hills RD is also located in the northern portion of the Black Hills National Forest, but in the state of South Dakota with headquarters in Spearfish, South Dakota. The remaining two districts are also located in South Dakota and include the 357,300-acre Mystic RD found in the central section of the Black Hills and the Hell Canyon RD which manages approximately 600,000 acres in the southern portion of the forest.

Table 1. Acres of non-NFS and NFS lands within the plan area

Ranger District	Non-NFS	NFS	Total
Bearlodge (Sundance, WY)	26,616	175,864	202,480
Hell Canyon (Custer, SD)	150,940	450,402	601,341
Mystic (Rapid City, SD)	47,039	310,219	357,258
Northern Hills (Spearfish, SD)	61,703	313,837	375,540
Total	286,297	1,250,322	1,536,619

[Acronyms: NFS, National Forest System. Source: USFS 2020.]

As shown on Map 1 (Appendix A), there is a complicated and intermingled pattern of public and private lands in and around the plan area. Wildlife habitats and migration corridors may be fragmented by buildings, fences, access roads, utility lines, and other infrastructure on private property. Maintaining habitat connectivity requires working with adjacent private landowners and other agencies as there are currently no conservation easements on NFS lands to restrict development and decrease fragmentation, although there are some within the administrative boundary (Table 2). The Black Hills National Forest works with several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work with private landowners to establish conservation easements. These NGOs include The Nature Conservancy (TNC), The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Trust for Public Land (TPL), The Conservation Fund, and Northern Prairies Land Trust.

Table 2. Acreage of conservation easements

Conservation Easement	Acres
Cheyenne River Canyons Easement	8,411
Circle Z Land Company	7
USFS Region 02 - Rocky Mountain Region Conservation Easement	0
Grasslands Reserve Program	309
Mount Rushmore National Memorial	1
Wind Cave National Park	3
Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust Easement	1,857
Total	10,588

[Acronyms: USFS, U.S. Forest Service. Source: Black Hills National Forest]

Land Access

Access is the ability to move to, from, or through the plan area by any means, including pedestrian access from properties adjacent to the plan area. The plan area is accessed by several secondary U.S. and State Highways, as well as numerous county roads, NFS roads, and trails. Interstate 90 is a main access route, which borders the forest and crosses from west to east along the northeastern edge of the Black Hills. Other major access routes include Highway 85, which provides access to the northwest section of the forest, entering on the west and exiting on the north. Highway 385 roughly bisects the plan area from north to south and Highway 16 provides access from east to west. These highways provide access to the NFS roads, which connect to other public roads managed by a variety of jurisdictions. Miles of roads and associated density (road miles per square mile) within the forest are listed by jurisdiction in table 3.

Table 3. Miles of Road by Jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Miles of Road
Bureau of Land Management	1
County	104
Federal Aviation Administration	1
Local	1
Private	23
State	1
State Highway	37

[Source: Black Hills National Forest.]

Forest Service Road Core (2021) and Travel Management Rule, requires any roads, trails, and areas that are to be open to motor vehicle use on a national forest be officially designated by class of vehicle and by season of use. In response to this rule, the Black Hills National Forest designated certain roads and trails as reflected on the motor vehicle use map found in the *Recreation Assessment* to reflect current and anticipated travel needs, offer a variety of recreational opportunities, and provide for administrative access, while balancing the physical, biological, and social attributes of the forest.

The current designation, as approved in the 2010 Record of Decision on the Black Hills National Forest Travel Management Plan, provides 3,466 miles of roads, (including 2,226 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads), boosts motorized trails to 663 miles, and limits cross-country motorized use to a portion of the Black Hills National Forest only for the purposes of game retrieval (elk only) or dispersed camping.

There are thousands of miles of unauthorized routes on the forest, including both roads and trails (USFS, 2010). Some of them were used for forest management activities on a temporary basis. Users then adopted these routes over time and in some cases have used them for decades. Other routes are user-created. These routes were developed by repeated cross-country driving on the same path, winding access through the trees. User-created routes have not been designed by engineers and are sometimes situated in poor locations on the landscape, often resulting in adverse impacts to soil, water, riparian and other wildlife habitat, and cultural and other resources. The USFS allows administrative access sufficient to carry out official business, including conducting resource surveys, administering contracts and permits, suppressing wildfires or addressing other emergencies, maintaining roads and other facilities, and other activities. Access is also allowed to contractors and permit holders operating within the terms and scope of their contract or permit, to conduct government-related business. This specifically includes, but is not limited to, commercial traffic such as timber sale purchasers, road contractors, and those holding special use and livestock grazing permits. Reasonable administrative access is allowed as appropriate for other local, state, and federal agencies to manage their adjacent or isolated parcels. The Forest works cooperatively with landowners to maintain access, while improving Forest access through increased rights-of-way acquisitions.

If an authorized road or OHV is needed for timber or fuels management or fire suppression, all public use may be suspended or permanently discontinued. Substitute routes may be designated.

The Forest has hundreds of miles of hiking trails varying in length and difficulty. The Mickelson Trail provides access through the western half of the forest from Deadwood to Edgemont, while the Centennial Trail spans the eastern side of the forest, from Bear Butte State Park to just north of Wind Cave National Park Trails (non-motorized and motorized trails are discussed in the *Recreation Assessment*).

Land Use

The current forest plan for the Black Hills National Forest subdivides the forest into eight general land use categories to better define management goals for similar areas, such as those that see extensive human use (Category 8) to those that are relatively undisturbed (Category 1). Management depends on the category in which the area lies, but overall management strategies allow a variety of uses ranging from wilderness and research areas to lands designated for off-road vehicle use and camping. Resource extraction such as timber and minerals are also permitted, although to a lesser extent and only when it aligns with management goals. A general Land Use Map is included as Map 1 in Appendix A of this document.

The USFS authorizes a wide variety of public and private uses on NFS lands through special-use authorizations, the most common being Federal Land Policy and Management Act permits and easements. These authorizations give holders varying degrees of property interest. Many special-use authorizations involve activities related to recreation (e.g., outfitting and guiding, OHV use, and recreation residences) and are addressed in the *Preliminary Draft Recreation* assessment. Other special-use authorizations involve non-recreation infrastructure such as driveways or access to public property, commercial filming, research, utilities and communications, specifically fiber optic cable, electrical services (buried and overhead), domestic-use broadband and communications towers, water storage, and transmission lines.

Trends

Land Status and Ownership Trends

Currently there are approximately 287,000 acres of private inholdings within the administrative boundary of the forest. Applications for development on private lands are increasing, especially along the corridors within Boulder Canyon, along U.S. Highway 85 in the northern Hills, the Hill City area, along Sheridan Lake Road near Rapid City, and along Highways 385, 44, and 16.

The increasing presence of infrastructure in and adjacent to the plan area, particularly buildings, bridges, utilities, and communication sites, affects fire management decisions dramatically. First, these facilities require protection from wildfires, which may take the form of pre-fire fuels reduction efforts, defensive suppression tactics during a wildfire, or the selection of different tactics and strategies for specific wildfires than if the infrastructure were not present. Fire is a key ecosystem disturbance process on much of the Black Hills National Forest landscape, but the presence of infrastructure reduces the capability of fire managers to utilize fire in its natural role in some locations. For example, managing wildfires to obtain resource benefits often poses too much risk to adjacent infrastructure. As a result, more aggressive suppression strategies that limit the extent of fire on the landscape both spatially and temporally are often selected over less aggressive management tactics that would allow fire to burn more naturally, and with lower suppression costs.

The Black Hills National Forest may seek to acquire isolated tracts of land within the forest for management purposes. Recent examples of land acquisition since the last plan update in 1997 include a land-to-land exchange between the USFS, the Black Hills National Forest, and Capstone Properties, LLC on April 19, 2006, to exchange 97 acres of federal land for 120 acres of non-federal land known as Greyhound Gulch within Pennington County, SD.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has purchased over 2,700 acres from private inholdings since 2007 (table 4), including a 2,400-acre purchase of Lady C Ranch during 2007-2011. Most recent purchases include a TPL purchase of Spring Creek Watershed in 2019 and a TNC purchase of Slate Creek in 2012, which was considered a critical inholding.

Table 4. Land and Water Conservation Fund project recent acquisitions

Project Name	Acres	\$ Amount	Year
Lady C Phase I	280	840,000	2007
Lady C Phase II	200	600,000	2007
Lady C Phase III	330	990,000	2008
Lady C Phase IV	170	510,000	2008
Lady C Phase V	577.50	1,732,500	2009
Lady C Phase VI	557.50	1,803,358	2010
Lady C Phase VII	285	670,000	2011
Slate Creek (TNC)	10.33	77,500	2012
Spring Creek Watershed (TPL)	349.38	1,739,000	2019

[Source: Black Hills National Forest.]

The Black Hills Land Claim Movement to return Indigenous land to Indigenous ownership has resulted in ongoing land disputes with Native Tribes (Brys, 2021). The Native American Sioux Nation purchased 1,942 acres of the Black Hills National Forest in November 2012, which included the sacred Pe' Sla site. An additional 437 acres adjacent to this property was purchased in 2014.

Access Trends

Information regarding types and allowances of road and trail access are found primarily in two companion assessments: *Recreation Settings, Opportunities, and Scenic Character* and *Infrastructure*.

Unauthorized cross-country travel on the forest has increased over time as OHVs, all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles have become more popular forms of recreational travel. In addition to cross-country travel, users often travel on routes created from timber sales or mining activities to traverse the countryside and avoid the main road systems. These routes were closed after completion of management activities using vegetation or closure devices to prohibit motorized travel and were never considered part of the overall transportation system for the forest. They are referred to as unauthorized routes. As off-highway travel became more popular, these unauthorized routes were discovered and “adopted” by the public as motorized riding opportunities. In addition to management-created unauthorized routes, user-created routes have also developed from continuous use by the public. These routes were often not designed to professional engineered standards but formed as a motorized vehicle continuously traversed the ground, creating tire ruts in the soil.

Unauthorized driveways to private property are another form of unauthorized route. There are dozens of these routes in existence and more are created every year. These routes are especially prevalent in urban interface areas where small private parcels are developed for residential use. The USFS actively works with landowners to issue special use authorizations for legal access to their private properties and to require certain levels of road maintenance by the landowner to protect the surrounding national forest. Many of the system hiking trails within the forest (especially undeveloped trails) are seldom used by visitors. Often these trails are underutilized due to lack of awareness that these trails exist. If this pattern continues, the forest will continue to see a widening difference between the visitor use on a select few destinations compared to the rest of the forest. Additional information on non-motorized and motorized trails are discussed in the *Assessment: Recreation Settings, Opportunities, and Scenic Character*.

The USFS has other needs for improved access and is actively working to acquire access across private property within the forest. One example is the lack of access to Native American Sacred Sites. Indigenous

groups are not given the necessary access to many of the sites where they practice traditional ceremonies and harvest resource materials such as tipi poles and native plants. For example, the 1,397-acre Inyan Kara Sacred Site, a Native American site of cultural importance, is surrounded by private land.

Use Trends

USFS lands are guided by the 1960 Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act. This law states that national forests should be managed in a manner where all resources are regarded equally and in perpetuity without impairment of the resource productivity.

There is a general increase in demand for all non-recreational special uses across the forest, resulting in increased access requests via special use authorizations. Requests by utility companies for special use authorizations have been increasing due to federal programs and funding sources (specifically broadband fiber optic installations) and an increase in development of private inholdings to connect rural communities to utility infrastructure. With the boom in land sales, water transmission line permits, and the creation of subdivisions, the Black Hills National Forest has seen an increase in the request for access on non-system roads as well as requests to maintain and plow snow on open system roads.

Use and occupancy of NFS land is on an upward trend and will most likely continue. It is important to continue managing the forest under the guidance of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act to provide management equality for all its resources. This is critical to sustaining local economies that rely on recreation, tourism, and resource development. These multiple uses and ecosystem services are discussed in the *Socioeconomic Assessment*. Funding and staff availability to pursue land purchases and right-of-way acquisitions to secure legal access are often limited.

Management

Land Ownership Influence

The USFS may seek to acquire lands to meet resource management objectives, including lands adjacent to designated wilderness, areas of outstanding scenic significance, and areas that contain threatened, endangered, or sensitive species habitat. Lands that fall under specific categories, such as loss of National Forest Character, mineral fractions, or road rights-of-way of parcels less than 40 acres, will be considered for conveyance or exchange for more desirable parcels that meet management objectives. The USFS pursues land ownership adjustment through purchase, sale, exchange, or donation per criteria in Guidelines 8101 through 8104 of the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Phase II Amendment and strives to improve Forest access through increased rights-of-way acquisition.

Access Influence

Per the Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, the USFS has an objective to maintain and increase roads to support long-term sustainable production of commodities, resource management, and recreation access while decreasing unauthorized roads. The USFS is trending towards fewer unauthorized roads and increased access through cooperation with private landowners. Land Use Influence

The current forest plan is the primary influence for project-specific and resource specific management decisions. While the forest plan does not provide specifics, it does provide general direction to guide management activities on a forest wide scale, providing a consistent means to influence land use through identification of desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and suitability of lands in the plan area for multiple uses (USDA Forest Service, 2016). The Black Hills National Forest can influence

land by issuing special use authorizations for activities that are compatible with forest plan objectives while limiting their impact on forest health over the long term. For example, the forest identifies encroachments and trespasses almost daily during the busy field season by other resource management entities such as range management, timber sale layout and tree marking crews, fire suppression activities etc. These encroachments and trespasses are sometimes erroneous but can also be willful and negligent. The Forest benefits from identifying and encouraging the public to obtain special use authorization to reduce time and staff spent resolving these issues.

Actions of Others

Management Coordination Opportunities

Black Hills National Forest works closely with other government entities, partners, and stakeholders as appropriate to define complementary roles that best meet the needs of the forest. Interested parties and stakeholders coordinate in the development of plans and projects (USDA Forest Service, 2006).

Due to the unique interface of communities on the edge of the Black Hills National Forest, many local county governments have identified the need to coordinate growth and development by maintaining strong partnerships with the USFS. This level of close coordination should be further enhanced between those with jurisdiction in the county to provide public services and efficient development patterns.

Black Hills National Forest can also work with county governments to support their resource management goals. Specifically, cooperation between the agencies can help to reduce urban sprawl, promote education regarding access to natural areas, and encourage personal responsibility related to popular recreational sites.

As discussed above, land ownership adjustment activities can be used to continue to improve the environmental sustainability of land ownership, use, and access patterns by reducing private inholdings and limiting development in areas where it would negatively impact resources and constrain forest management options.

Chapter 3. Conclusions

Environmental Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

Development or uses of private land within the plan area may be compatible with the management goals of adjacent NFS lands, but can cause habitat fragmentation, promote the spread of invasive species, and contribute to sedimentation of waterbodies. In addition, fuels reduction projects such as prescribed burning and mechanical treatments are often prioritized immediately adjacent to private infrastructure to reduce future risk to those structures and improvements. This prioritization results in an inability to apply these tools to the extent needed at other locations for ecosystem restoration and fuels reduction.

Unauthorized roads in the forest are not sustainable. These roads are usually unplanned and are likely to be poorly located, resulting in higher erosion potential. Reducing the amount of unauthorized roads through mitigation identified in this forest plan will improve the landscape and provide more reasonable and sustainable access to private inholdings.

Funding is not sufficient to perform all the maintenance necessary to upkeep the long-term conditions of all the roads and trails in the Black Hills National Forest, especially with the increase in OHV traffic causing additional damage to the area. Conditions may worsen, but revised forest plan direction could mitigate some of these potential impacts.

OHV use and its associated impacts are a priority issue. The Black Hills National Forest has many inholdings and a large amount of urban interface, which has expanded in recent years due to increased development adjacent to Forest lands. This has led to increased urgency for management activities in the urban interface, particularly timber, fuel, pest, and invasive species management.

Economic Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

The Black Hills National Forest is a driver of economic opportunities in the local area, including timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and outdoor recreation. Across the seven-county area of influence, approximately 24 percent of the land is federally managed (USGS, 2018). As a major land manager in the area, USFS management actions have the potential to affect the future of these economic opportunities by maintaining access to the plan area. It is important to continue managing the forest under the guidance of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act by providing management equality for all the various resources within the forest to protect the local economy and Forest resources. This is critical to sustaining local economies that rely on recreation, tourism, and resource development. These multiple uses and ecosystem services are discussed in the *Socioeconomic Assessment*, as well as other assessments. Funding and staff availability to pursue land purchases and right-of-way acquisitions to secure legal access are often limited.

Social Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

The 2012 Planning Rule defines social sustainability as “the capability of society to support the network of relationships, traditions, culture, and activities that connect people to the land and to one another and support vibrant communities” (36 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] §219.19).

Most counties in the seven-county area of influence experienced population increases between 2010 and 2019. However, some counties saw notably high population growth relative to other counties in the areas of influence. The seven-county area of influence had greater population growth (10.3 percent) than the overall U.S., South Dakota, and Wyoming (6.8, 8.9, and 6.5 percent, respectively). Of the seven counties, Pennington County, followed by Crook County and Meade County had the highest increases in population (13, 10.5, and 10.2 percent, respectively) (U.S. DOC2020a).

As populations grow, conflicts between local residents and forest visitors may increase. While living close to public lands may provide residents with amenities such as convenient access to recreation and wildlife viewing, increased forest congestion causes disadvantages such as crowds, litter, and noise (Garber-Yonts, 2004; Bolitzer and Netusil, 2000). As residential areas and populations surrounding the forest grow, the area's need for infrastructure increases, which may place greater pressure on the forest to provide, for example, utility rights-of-way. This type of pressure may threaten the forest's role in contributing to sense of place and the quality of life in surrounding communities (Stedman, 2003). Homes located near forests (i.e., the wildland urban interface [WUI]) are at risk of wildfire-related disturbances. Expanding populations around the forest result in more homes in the WUI. There is greater risk to these growing communities from increased frequency and extent of wildfire due to climate change (Timberlake et al., 2021).

County comprehensive plans from the area of influence emphasize the importance of sustainable economic growth that provides diverse job opportunities while protecting the rural character and natural amenities that characterize many of the communities.

- The Custer County Comprehensive Plan (2009) lists a goal to “promote a desirable rural atmosphere, character, and appearance in the county.” The Plan says that “in a 2007 survey more than 84% of the residents that responded overwhelmingly selected the “Rural Lifestyle” as the most important reason that they choose to live in Custer County.”
- The Lawrence County Comprehensive Plan (2020) states that “residents and stakeholders emphasized the special sense of place in Lawrence County, characterized by its rich history, unique incorporated and rural communities, and the surrounding natural environment and opportunities for outdoor recreation.” It also noted that “being stewards of the land and caring for the environment are important values to Lawrence County residents.”
- The Meade County Comprehensive Plan (2010) includes a goal “to maintain a viable agricultural economy and preserve the rural quality of life.”
- The Pennington County Comprehensive Plan (2020) vision statement says: “We pride ourselves on protecting the natural, cultural, and historic resources that help define our social identity and values. The County continues to grow in a manner that maintains water and air quality, improves career and housing opportunities, and retains our excellent schools and quality of life.”
- The Crook County Comprehensive Land Use Plan (2014) commits itself “to the protection of private property rights and private property interests including investment backed expectations, protection of local historical custom and culture, protection of the traditional economic structures in the County which form the base for economic stability for the County, opening of new economic opportunities through reliance on open markets, and protection of the right of the enjoyment of the natural resources of the County by all citizens and those communities utilizing those natural resources within the County”.
- The DRAFT Weston County Natural Resource Management Plan (2022) outlines the goal to “protect private property, the local tax base, and local custom and culture”.

Landownership Adjustment and Rights-of Way Acquisition

The forest plan generally directs that floodplain and wetland values on the lands going out of and coming into federal ownership in land exchanges should be equal or in favor of the United States. Additionally, the general direction for classifying lands for acquisition or disposal purposes are as follows:

Acquisition

- Land in designated wilderness and other congressionally classified areas,
- Where lands or rights-of-way are needed to meet resource management objectives,
- Land which provides habitat for threatened and endangered species,
- Land which includes floodplains or wetlands and any conveyance of floodplains or wetlands out of federal ownership are equalized by obtaining similar floodplains and wetlands through acquisition and,
- Lands having historical or cultural resources, outstanding scenic values, or critical ecosystems, when these resources are threatened by change of use or when management may be enhanced by public ownership.

Disposal

- To states, counties, cities, or other federal agencies when disposal will serve a greater public interest,
- In small parcels intermingled with mineral or homestead patents,
- When suitable for development by the private sector (residential, agriculture, industrial, recreational, etc.) is in the public interest, and,
- When critical or unique resource effects are mitigated by reserving interest to protect the resource, or by exchange where other critical resources to be acquired are of equal or greater value.

Management goals in the current forest plan state that exchange and transfer of land should be increased, and rights-of-way needed to support management of national forest resources should be acquired. Additionally, general direction provides that rights-of way should be acquired on existing NFS roads and trails that cross private lands. While all this direction is being implemented to some extent, these are time-intensive and specialized activities that require significant investment in staff time and training. Budget constraints and staffing levels have a significant impact on the Black Hills National Forest's ability to implement this direction.

Non-Recreation Special Use Management

Special use authorizations are generally allowed if they are complementary and compatible with the development level and other management objectives defined in the land management designations of the area where they are located. General direction also provides that special uses should not be approved that can be reasonably met on private or other non-federal lands unless they are clearly in the public interest, and that special uses should not be approved adjacent to recreation sites unless such use is compatible. This direction is generally being implemented.

Issues in the Broader Landscape

Regional population and visitation levels are increasing dramatically and are not expected to slow down. A 2020 National Migration Study ranked South Dakota as the fourth most popular location nationwide to relocate (Manus, 2021). According to the Rapid City Journal, real estate sale numbers are up by

approximately 50% and new builds are up about 500%. Shifts in tourism and visitor use have been steadily increasing, with a 1.7 million increase in visitation levels to South Dakota from 2013 to 2019, a 13% increase. In 2018, the Black Hills National Forest region captured approximately 40% of the income from visitor sales (Tourism Economics, 2020). While invigorating for the local economy, this also puts pressure on the ability of Black Hills National Forest to manage and best meet the needs of the forest and adjacent communities with limited resources as increased use results in increased maintenance costs.

The trend for use and occupancy of NFS land is on an upward trend and will most likely continue as demand for the USFS to respond to requests for infrastructure upgrades increase in tandem with the increase in population. Local resident desire for a rural lifestyle as identified in county comprehensive plans will need to be balanced with population growth and associated infrastructure need.

References Cited

- Brys, M. 2021. Atlas. Black Hills, South Dakota. World Atlas.
<https://www.worldatlas.com/mountains/black-hills-south-dakota.html>. Accessed December 2, 2021.
- Bolitzer, B. and N.R. Netusil. 2000. "The Impact of Open Space on Property Values in Portland, Oregon." *Journal of Environmental Management* 59:185-193.
- Crook County. 2014. Crook County Comprehensive Land Use Plan.
http://www.crookcounty.wy.gov/departments/growth_and_development/docs/2014comprehensivelanduseplan.pdf
- Custer County. 2009. Custer County Comprehensive Plan. <https://www.custercountysd.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Community-Facilities-Services-and-Infrastructure.pdf> Lawrence County (2020).
- Lawrence County Comprehensive Plan 2030. Lawrence County, South Dakota Planning and Zoning Office.
- Garber-Yonts, B.E. 2004. "The Economics of Amenities and Migration in the Pacific Northwest: Review of Selected Literature with Implications for National Forest Management." General Technical Report PNW-GTR-617. Portland, OR: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Pacific Northwest Research Station. 48 pages. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/treearch/pubs/7446>
- Manus, T. 2021. Black Hills becoming a top destination for out-of-state residents. Rapid City Journal. Available from: https://rapidcityjournal.com/news/black-hills-becoming-a-top-destination-for-out-of-state-residents/article_742b7f7c-542f-5d18-bc0a-4789d3abc32e.html. Accessed January 2022.
- Meade County. 2010. Meade County Comprehensive Plan.
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55f1f6a6e4b0fdc2e7a036d1/t/619bdcad83ba4002ad7d61db/1637604531605/MC+Comprehensive+Plan.pdf>
- Pennington County. 2020. Pennington County Comprehensive Plan.
http://docs.pennco.org/docs/PZ/Pennington%20County%20Comprehensive%20Plan_May%202020.pdf
- Stedman, R. 2003. Sense of place and forest science: toward a program of quantitative research. *Forest Science*. 49(6): 822–829.
- Timberlake, T.J.; Halofsky, J.E.; Joyce, L.A.; Peterson, D.L. 2021. Climate change vulnerability in the Black Hills National Forest. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Western Wildland Environmental Threat Assessment Center. Unpublished report.
- Tourism Economics. 2020. Economic impact of tourism in South Dakota 2020. Available from: https://sdvisit.com/sites/default/files/2021-01/20EcoImp_Tourism_Economics.pdf. Accessed January 2022.
- USFS. 2006. Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, 1997 Revision with Phase II Amendment. Available from: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/blackhills/landmanagement/planning/?cid=STELPRDB5112303>. Accessed December 2021, January 2022.
- USFS. 2007. Black Hills National Forest - Forest-wide travel analysis report. Available from: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd527395.pdf. Accessed January 2022.
- USFS. 2010. Final EIS: Black Hills National Forest Travel Management Plan. USDA Forest Service.
- USFS. 2016. A citizens' guide to National Forest planning Version 1.0. Available from: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd509144.pdf. Accessed January 2022.

USFS. 2020. Land Areas of the National Forest System. Available from:

<https://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR2020/lar2020index.html>. Accessed January 2022.

USFS. 2021. Schedule of Proposed Actions 04/01/2021 to 06/30/2021 on the Black Hills National Forest.

Available from: <https://www.fs.fed.us/sopa/forest-level.php?110203>. Accessed January 2022.

Appendix A. Map

The following map is provided as a separate PDF document on the forest plan revision [assessment webpage](#) for the Black Hills National Forest.

Map 1. Black Hills National Forest Land Ownership