

Implementation Process and Public Engagement¹

A Process for Adaptive Implementation of the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment

Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests
USDA Forest Service
In cooperation with:
Center for Public Lands, Western Colorado University
Rocky Mountain Research Station, USDA Forest Service

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this document is to describe activities comprising the adaptive implementation and monitoring framework for the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Project (Taylor Park Project).

- Continue the public participation and collaborative learning that occurred during the planning phase, encourage and support the continuation of collaborative workgroup efforts throughout implementation;
- Ensure implementation of treatments is responsive to dynamic on-the-ground conditions, new scientific information, and public input;
- Demonstrate compliance with management direction specified in the Environmental Assessment/Decision Notice (EA/DN);
- Conduct a transparent adaptive implementation process that keeps the public informed of and involved in treatment unit timing, design, and monitoring;
- Ensure integrated engagement of interdisciplinary team members, field personnel, scientists, line officers and the public;
- Focus on shared priorities and work to resolve concerns and solve problems related to selection and implementation of Taylor Park Project treatment units;
- Conduct monitoring activities, interpret and share results, adapt implementation practices to improve results and better meet project objectives.

ADAPTIVE IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

The Taylor Park Project EA/DN specifies this adaptive implementation framework for defining treatment locations and design, determining monitoring questions, reviewing and evaluating the effects of treatments, and adjusting management towards desired conditions and away from undesirable conditions. These actions will involve public stakeholders, the science team, and forest staff.

During scoping for the Taylor Park Project, the public expressed a desire to form a local adaptive management group to be involved with the planning and implementation of the project through an adaptive framework. To be responsive to this request, the Forest entered into an agreement with Western Colorado University's Center for Public Lands to facilitate the forming and management of a local adaptive management group. The public participation that occurred during the planning process was

¹ *This document was Appendix E in the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Environmental Assessment. This version reflects the update specified in the April 30, 2020 Errata (Appendix 1 of the Taylor Park Vegetation Management Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact signed May 7, 2020).*

significantly aided by the efforts of this collaborative workgroup of diverse stakeholders that would eventually form the formal adaptive management group. For implementation, specific phases and activities are outlined below. The intent is that this adaptive implementation framework will be utilized over a multi-year timeframe (approximately 10 years for Alternative 1 or 20 years for Alternative 2).

Stakeholder opportunities to influence Taylor Park Project implementation are outlined for each step of the process. Opportunities are confined by the sideboards of the selected alternative, as outlined in the Final Environmental Assessment (EA) and Decision Notice. Further, the Forest Service retains the authority to make final decisions related to location, extent and types of treatments planned and completed consistent with the EA/Decision Notice. However, if at any time a stakeholder has a specific question or concern related to any aspect of implementation under Taylor Park Project, forest staff will respond to stakeholder input to the greatest extent practicable and will provide feedback to stakeholders about how their concerns were addressed. The process outlined here is required by the Decision Notice and stakeholder involvement will be ongoing throughout the life of the project.

The adaptive implementation steps will cover pre-implementation treatment planning; post-implementation review; annual monitoring, evaluation, and new science integration; and annual management review with the interdisciplinary team.

Commercial and non-commercial treatments that occur under the authority of the EA/Decision Notice will take up several years to pass through all the phases of implementation. Therefore, at any given time there will be several projects occurring that have passed through different steps of implementation and monitoring. The public will be invited to participate as discussed below.

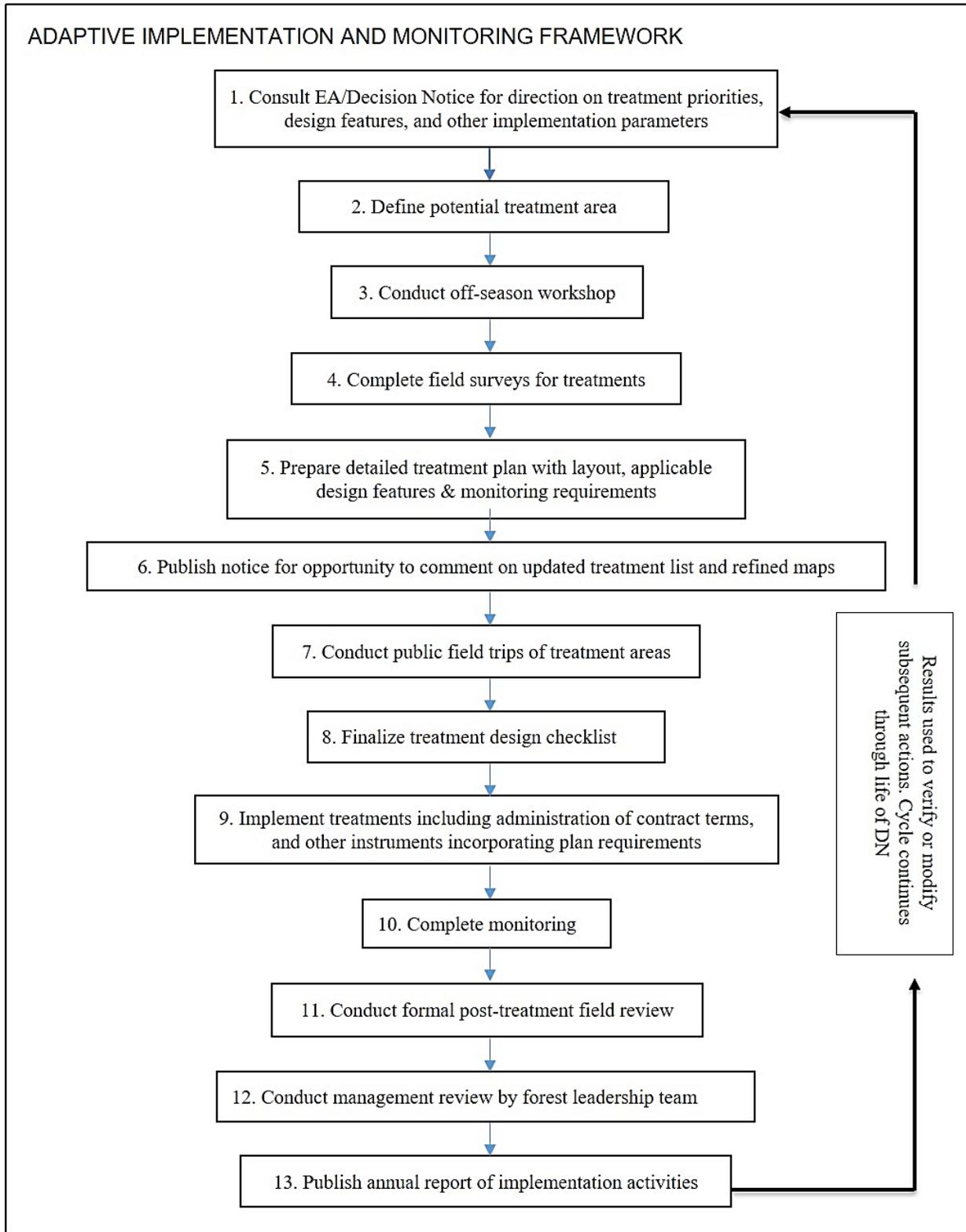


Figure 1. Adaptive implementation and monitoring framework

Step 1) Consult the EA/Decision Notice for direction on treatment priorities, design features, and other parameters.

The direction in the EA/Decision Notice reflects comprehensive public participation and collaborative efforts conducted over the planning period. The public had opportunities to influence all elements of these documents.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Become familiar with the implementation parameters of the EA/Decision Notice to develop an understanding of these limits and requirements and enhance ability to more meaningfully participate in implementation and adaptive management;
- B. Treatment needs outside of the EA/Decision Notice would need to be addressed under separate planning efforts.

Step 2) Define potential treatments

The treatment areas will form the bounds for out-year Taylor Park Project treatments that become part of the normal Forest Service program of work, including the 5-year timber sale, fuels management, and wildlife habitat programs. Nearer-term treatment units will be delineated with more detail, while out-year treatments may be shown with broader boundaries.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

The forest will share information on the details of proposed treatment units as they become available, thereby enabling the Adaptive Management Group and all stakeholders the opportunity to learn about implementation activities prior to the subsequent steps. Updated information will be posted on the forest website.

Step 3) Conduct off-season workshop with stakeholders and science team.

Each year a winter or spring workshop will be held with stakeholders and the interdisciplinary team to discuss the implementation program, including:

- Proposed new out-year treatments;
- Report status of treatments already planned/in process of being implemented;
- Findings from the prior-year management review of treatments and the out-year program of work;
- Monitoring results to date and proposed coming-year and out-year multi-party monitoring;
- Evaluation and feedback on potential need for change in implementation or monitoring practices;
- New science and individual studies within the context of the larger body of scientific literature;

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Review updated maps of proposed treatment units, evaluate, discuss and comment on priority sequencing of treatments, treatment prescriptions, EA/Decision Notice compliance;
- B. Provide feedback to the Forest Service regarding prior-year Management Review;
- C. Input on types and location of monitoring. Participants will be invited to participate in monitoring during summer field trips;

- D. Identify applicable peer-reviewed science to be considered in annual science summary;
- E. Raise questions and make suggestions to be considered for further administrative study and multi-party monitoring.

Step 4) Complete field surveys of treatment units.

Forest Service personnel will conduct initial field surveys of proposed treatment units to confirm that treatments can be designed and implemented in conformance with EA/Decision Notice parameters, and how to do so.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

The results from this agency effort will develop refined implementation products that will further inform the public in the following steps.

Step 5) Prepare refined treatment plans and implementation instructions, including applicable design features, unit layout guidance, roadwork, and monitoring requirements, including selection of applicable design features.

Confirm design features to be applied to the given treatment. These are actions that will be incorporated in a treatment when resource conditions indicate the need to do so. For example, presence of a goshawk nest in a proposed treatment area triggers the use of design features to protect goshawks. Treatments will be adjusted as needed to conform to requirements or treatments will be deferred.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Detailed treatment plans will be posted on the forest website and available for public review as part of Step 6.
- B. Forest implementation team will assist the Adaptive Management Group and other stakeholders in interpreting detailed plans.

Step 6) Publish notice of opportunity to comment on updated treatment list, treatment plans, refined maps, and schedule.

Annually, the Forest will publish a single notice in local newspapers requesting comments from the general public on the following year's planned treatments. Publication of the updated treatment list, status of implementation activities, refined treatment plans and maps will provide a broad audience of public participants an opportunity to stay informed of and comment on treatment implementation priorities, on-the-ground treatment design, and monitoring activities. This will be an additional opportunity benefiting those participants who are not available to participate in field trips and meetings. The review and comment period will run for 30 days. Comments will be considered by the implementation teams and responsible official and used to adjust treatment plans as warranted.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

Provide comments and recommendations to responsible official and district implementation teams concerning:

- A. Selection and scheduling of treatments;
- B. Types and locations of planned treatments;
- C. Monitoring topics, questions, and priorities;
- D. Application and adequacy of design features;

Treatment conformance to scope of EA/DN, disclosure of environmental effects, and adherence to decision parameters.

Step 7) Conduct public field trips of treatment areas.

Every year the public will be invited to interact with the GMUG staff and science team members on Taylor Park Project implementation field trips. There will be 1 trip per field season, dependent on public interest. Field review will focus on pre-treatment areas; however post-treatment and monitoring activities will likely be viewed on the same trip.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. View changing conditions on the ground and discuss adaptive management principles;
- B. Collaborative learning about on-the-ground conditions before and after treatment;
- C. Discuss treatment rationale (fit to EA/DN parameters) and treatment objectives;
- D. For pre-implementation site visits, identify treatment-specific resource concerns. District interdisciplinary team will seek to resolve resource concerns identified by the public to the greatest extent practicable.
- E. For post-treatment site visits, interdisciplinary team members will provide results from formal finding--identified surveys, design features, and post-treatment monitoring.
- F. Identify recommended treatment-level and project-wide adaptations;
- G. View areas where monitoring activities have occurred and discuss findings.
- H. View areas or discuss what treated areas will look like 10, 20, or more decades into the future—will desired conditions be met?

Step 8) Finalize treatment design checklist and implementation package (timber sale contract, stewardship contract, etc.)

The GMUG implementation team will prepare final implementation checklist (EA Appendix A), contracts, agreements, or other implementation instruments as reflective of this framework.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

Final documents will reflect public participation in previous steps and will be available for public review.

Step 9) Implement treatments, including administration of contract terms and other instruments incorporating plan requirements.

Administration of activities provides records of treatment compliance or approved modifications with rationale. This information will contribute to Steps 9-13.

Step 10) Complete treatment monitoring as specified in the final treatment design checklist and science team study plans.

Monitoring activities will be specified in implementation checklist (EA Appendix A) and the ongoing work of the science team. The final set of monitoring activities will be responsive to the public input received in the previous steps. Monitoring results will be used to inform agency and public dialog and deliberation on adaptive management adjustments to the treatment.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Participate in interpretation and use of monitoring data post-treatment reviews and off-season (mid-winter) meeting.
- B. Discuss potential changes in treatments as indicated by monitoring results.
- C. Recommend changes in monitoring activities to better serve collaborative learning and adaptive management.
- D. Participate in field monitoring opportunities identified in the science team program of work.

Step 11) Conduct formal post-treatment review.

In the SBEADMR project, an annual post-treatment review and site visit is performed in a treatment area. The Taylor Park project would become included as an option for review in this process.

Each year the forest will conduct one formal post-treatment review to provide stakeholders the opportunity to interact directly with Forest Service implementation teams, line officers, and science team members. Stakeholders will be invited to help select the commercial harvest or non-commercial mechanical treatments subject to the review. This formal agency review will:

- Demonstrate treatments are implemented in accordance with the EA/DN and other requirements or identify corrective actions.
- Ensure Forest accountability to stakeholders and show that treatments are being implemented in accordance with best available scientific evidence through the iterative treatment design and monitoring cycle.
- Ensure Forest accountability to stakeholders that pre-treatment input was considered in treatment location, design, implementation, and follow-up.
- Provide specific feedback to regulatory agencies (e.g. Fish and Wildlife Service and State Historic Preservation Office), documenting compliance with law and regulation specific to the Taylor Park Project DN.
- Provide summary of findings and any recommended changes (from interdisciplinary team and/or stakeholders) to treatment design and layout, best management practices, design features, or other aspects of a treatment in a report submitted to the district interdisciplinary team. Findings, including recommendations, will be addressed during the management review (Step 12).

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Provide evaluation and feedback on whether treatment implementation met expectations and was responsive to overall treatment objectives and EA/DN requirements;
- B. Provide evaluation and feedback about how well pre-treatment public input was incorporated into treatment design and implementation;

- C. Develop treatment-specific input and recommendations informed by the preponderance of scientific evidence, such as effectiveness of design features to address resource concerns;
- D. Foster dialog on implementation or monitoring concerns with interdisciplinary team and science team, and develop recommendations for improvements.
- E. Describe perceptions about whether desired conditions have been or will be met with treatments and follow-up activities.

Step 12) Complete management review by the District interdisciplinary team.

The goal of this step is to make certain district interdisciplinary team stays engaged in addressing environmental, social and management issues and takes action for continual improvement and incorporation of new knowledge during Taylor Park Project implementation. Final decision of management review will be applied to all future planned treatments under Taylor Park Project. The review will cover:

- Environmental and management issues resulting from Taylor Park Project implementation, and actions necessary to address concerns;
- Stakeholder recommendations and corresponding forest responses, provided at multiple stages throughout the year;
- Post-treatment interdisciplinary team review;
- Information provided from multi-party monitoring efforts;
- New best available science summarized by the science team;
- Changes in agency policy or direction;
- Changed conditions (such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service listing a species as threatened or endangered);
- Conclusions on whether the reviewed information warrants modifications to Taylor Park Project implementation, and whether such changes are within the scope of the EA/DN.

Step 13) Publish annual report of implementation activities, stakeholder participation, and management review findings.

Following completion of the annual management review, the GMUG will publish on the forest website a summary of all the steps in this adaptive implementation and monitoring framework. The goal is to transparently ensure compliance with the EA/DN, applicable laws/regulations, and integration of best available science throughout the life of the DN; and to demonstrate responsiveness to public participation in this framework.

Stakeholder Opportunities:

- A. Review annual report to stay informed of Taylor Park Project implementation activities;
- B. Plan future participation in implementation and monitoring as the GMUG moves forward, repeating the steps of the annual framework.