



U.S. Forest Service Southern Region

Sustainable Recreation Strategy

Executive Summary

December 2015



Talimena Scenic Drive
Ouachita NF

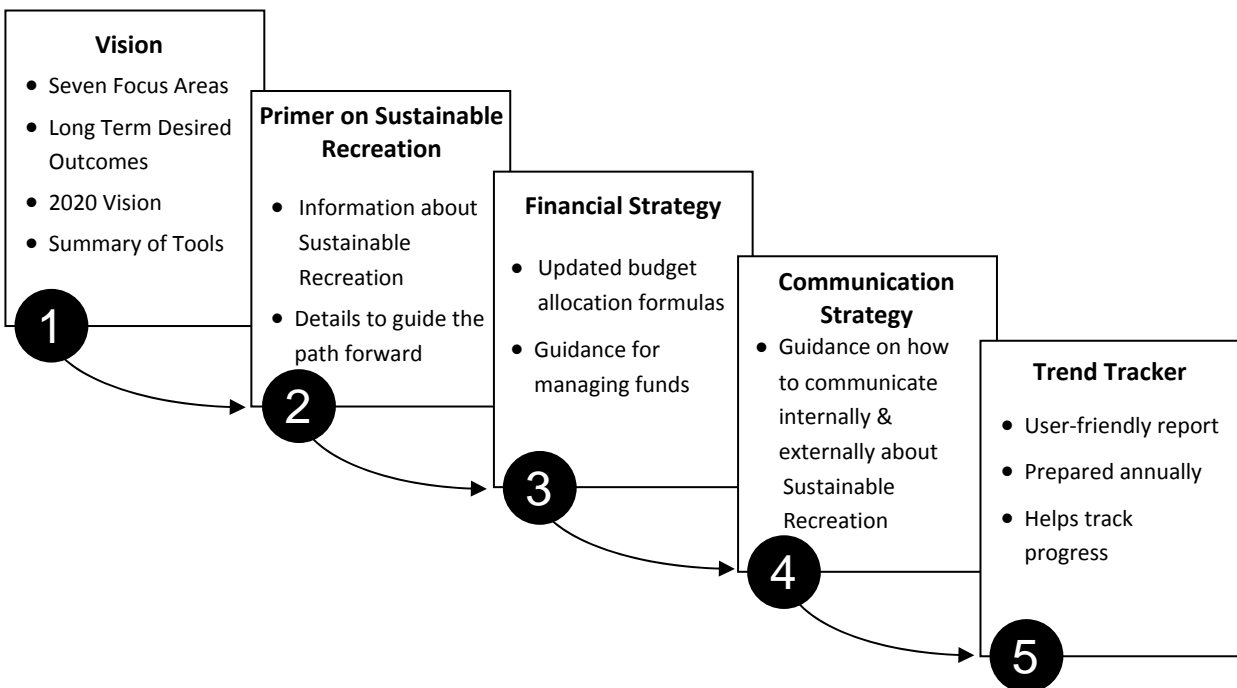
Sustainable Recreation Strategy



Executive Summary

What Is the Strategy for Sustainable Recreation?

The strategy is a five part set of documents to help managers be better informed when making decisions that will affect the sustainability of recreation opportunities in the Southern Region. The five parts are:



Why Is a Sustainable Recreation Strategy Needed?

National Forests offer some of the most valuable outdoor recreation settings that this country has to offer, but those settings and the visitor experiences they provide are increasingly at risk. The challenges seem endless – deteriorating recreation facilities, eroding trails, increasing user conflicts, and a decline in the quality of the visitor experience. Yet at the same time, there are many success stories and a world of opportunity to more effectively embrace the passion and support the public has for their public lands. Without a deliberate recalibration of how we approach managing recreation, the adverse trends will continue and opportunities for greater success will be lost. This strategy is intended to highlight the need for change and provide a pathway for success.

Desired Outcome of the Strategy

The desired outcome is to create a well-informed decision maker that understands the need for sustainable recreation and has the tools and support needed to transition towards a more sustainable future. Forest Supervisors retain their full discretion, and the manner and timing in which they choose to proceed is largely determined by the circumstances and needs of each unit.

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» The Importance of Alignment

A Well Aligned Program Is a Sustainable Program

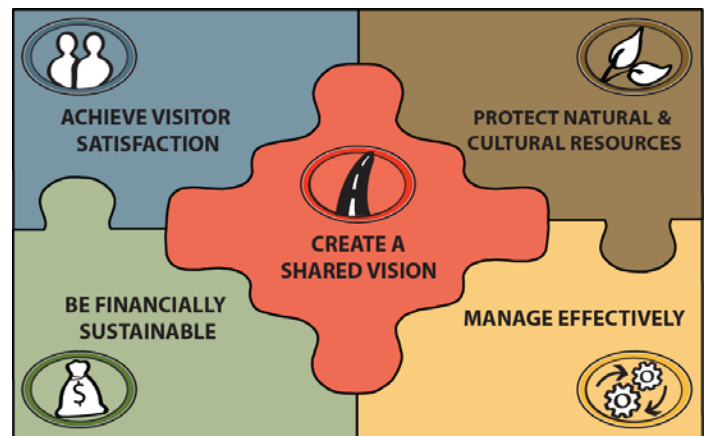
The Forest Service embraced the concept of sustainable recreation in the 2012 Planning Rule and in the “National Framework for Sustainable Recreation.” However, there is a gap between the broad concepts in these documents and what managers need to be able to translate them into a practical, operational framework that can guide them towards a sustainable future.

The Southern Region has used alignment to bridge this gap. The underlying principle is simple – “A well aligned program is a sustainable program.” By carefully choosing Critical Success Factors towards which to align, any decision or outcome can be evaluated to determine if it is trending towards or away from sustainability. If the agency consistently fails to achieve any one of the Critical Success Factors, over time the recreation program will face serious adverse consequences and ultimately, it will not be sustainable.

Five critical success factors have been identified that serve as indicators that a program is destined for long-term success. They are:

1. Achieve Visitor Satisfaction
2. Protect Natural & Cultural Resources
3. Be Financially Sustainable
4. Create a Shared Vision
5. Manage Effectively

The strategy has been designed to assure all five factors were given appropriate attention, and many of the tools are designed to systematically consider each factor.



Southern Region's 5 Critical Success Factors

We Need to Think Differently and Work Together

In a nutshell, the strategy promotes a fresh perspective that acknowledges the hard truths and challenges we face, while also providing optimism that there is a pathway to a more sustainable future. That pathway promotes a shift from traditional thinking to a new set of paradigms. It focuses on working more collaboratively with the public to create a shared vision of a sustainable future, while also coordinating more effectively across forest and district boundaries.

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Paradigm Shifts

TRADITIONAL VIEW POINT	PPARADIGM SHIFTS
Managing recreation is secondary to managing natural resources – it is “nice to do” but not our real work	Outdoor experiences are the primary way that most people connect to their National Forests. These opportunities are increasingly vital to the economies of local communities and are valued for the social and health benefits they provide, for encouraging citizen stewardship, and as a means of retaining our relevance as an agency.
Our problems are due to lack of money	The world is rapidly changing and public demands will continue to grow – more money is needed, but that alone will not create a lasting solution
We focus on providing more opportunities	We focus on providing sustainable opportunities
We work hard to retain every existing opportunity and provide new ones whenever possible – despite the stress this creates	We recognize we can’t be all things to all people in all places – the mix of opportunities we provide will change over time as we respond to changing public preferences and shifts in financial capability
We can figure this out ourselves	The only real solution is to work together with our stakeholders to share ownership in the challenges and work collaboratively to define a sustainable future
We do the work ourselves	We focus our limited agency funds on investing in the staff and skills needed to work with the public, leverage additional resources, and manage wisely
My unit is all I need to worry about	A sustainable future is dependent on working across boundaries and thinking at a larger scale- it is also dependent on sharing skills and learning from others
We use volunteers and partners to do work	We build and maintain mutually beneficial relationships that promote citizen stewardship and strengthen the connection of the public to these lands that they own – work accomplished is a positive outcome but not the sole focus of the relationship
We focus on what we can’t do	We understand the limits of our current capabilities, but then seek to harness the enormous energy and creativity of the public that cares for and benefits from these public lands

Sustainable Recreation Strategy



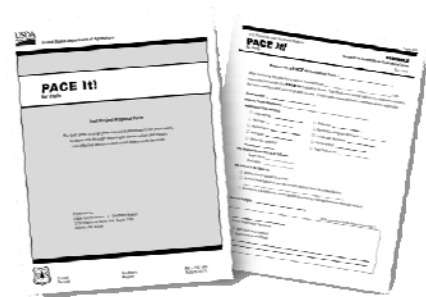
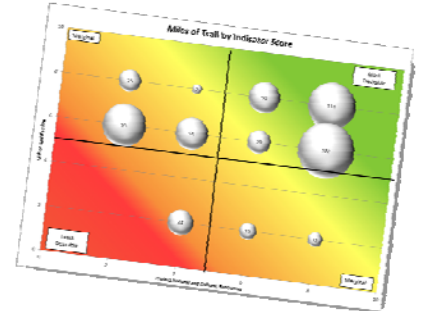
Tools and Products

SUMMARY OF TOOLS AND PRODUCTS CREATED AS PART OF THE REGIONAL STRATEGY TRAILS

- ◆ Trail Assessment Tools (existing trails)
 - ◆ Rapid Assessment
 - ◆ Alignment
 - ◆ Assessment
- ◆ PACE It! - for evaluating new trail proposals or major trail changes

Developed Sites

- ◆ Regional Level
 - ◆ Regional Priority Investment List
 - ◆ New Financial Framework for Understanding Developed Site Sustainability
- ◆ Forest Level
 - ◆ Forest Sustainable Sites list
 - ◆ Spreadsheet categorizing each site into the new framework groups
 - ◆ Recreation Site Maintenance Agreements
 - ◆ PACE It! - for evaluating project proposals related to developed sites
 - ◆ Operations and Maintenance Plan template
- ◆ Major Visitor Centers
 - ◆ Comprehensive assessment for each of the six sites in the Region
 - ◆ Detailed maintenance needs analysis and costing
 - ◆ Interim funding mechanism (pending completion of forest strategies)

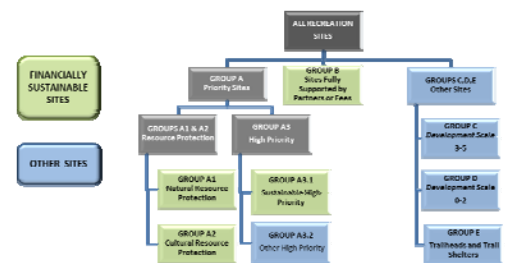


Volunteer and Service Programs

- ◆ Capacity Report – focused on addressing the lack of internal management capacity
- ◆ Flame Model – concise diagnostic of the challenges and opportunities
- ◆ Performance Levels – Descriptions used for the forest self-assessments
- ◆ Forest Self-Assessments –to help strengthen program focus on each forest

Budget

- ◆ New allocation formulas for NFRW, CMTL, CMFC, and CP09
- ◆ New approach to major project funding (Regional Priority Investment List)



Performance Tracking

- ◆ Annual "Trend Tracker" report

In addition, national efforts have provided tools and products that are also of direct value to this strategy. For example:

- ◆ National Framework for Sustainable Recreation
- ◆ Heritage - National Program Standards
- ◆ Wilderness—Wilderness Stewardship Performance Measures
- ◆ National Trails Strategy (still in draft)
- ◆ Updated national quality standards for developed sites (still in draft)
- ◆ USDA Forest Service - The Financial Sustainability of Our Facility Portfolio—2014

All of the above materials plus more can be found on the intranet website for the Southern Region's Recreation, Wilderness, Heritage, and Volunteer Staff .

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Contents of Parts 1 & 2



PART ONE—VISION

- ◆ The Southern Region: It's about People...and Challenges
- ◆ Framework
- ◆ Focus Areas: A Pathway Forward to Meet the Challenge
- ◆ Long Term Desired Conditions
- ◆ 2020 Vision
- ◆ Tools
- ◆ Flowchart

PART TWO—PRIMER on SUSTAINABLE RECREATION

- ◆ Preface
- ◆ Why Should I Care About Sustainable Recreation?
- ◆ Sustainability—A Fundamental Shift in Focus

Understanding What Sustainable Recreation Means

- ◇ How is Sustainable Recreation Defined?
- ◇ Alignment—Pathway to Sustainable Recreation
- ◇ A Closer Look at the Critical Success Factors
- ◇ At What Scale Does Sustainability Apply?

Sustainability of Trail Systems

- ◇ What Does It Mean to Have A Sustainable Trail System?
- ◇ How Do the New Trails Tools Help to Achieve Sustainability?
- ◇ What Types of Indicators Are Used for Trails?

Sustainability of Recreation Sites

- ◇ How Does Sustainability Apply to Recreation Sites?
- ◇ To What Extent Are Our Recreation Sites Sustainable?
- ◇ Why Is It Important to Understand Recreation Site Sustainability?
- ◇ How Should Recreation Site Sustainability Influence Decisions
- ◇ Shifting From “Worst First” Spending to Sustainable Investing

Decision Making, Performance, and Timetables

- ◇ How Does This Strategy and Alignment Alter Decision Making?
- ◇ Is There A Link between Performance and Budget?
- ◇ What is the Timetable for Progress from FY 15-17?

Hard Truths and the Path Forward

Hard Truths

Coping with the Hard Truths

What Do We Do Now as an RLT?

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers



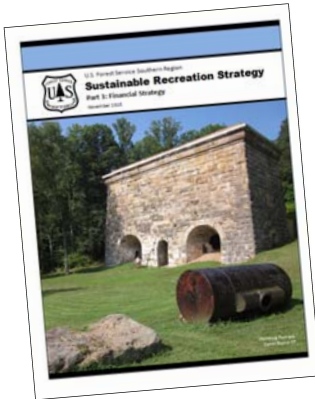
Appendices

- ◆ How Is the Sustainability of Recreation Sites Determined?
- ◆ Recreation Site Financial Groupings
- ◆ Recreation Site Maintenance Costing Assumptions
- ◆ Profile of a Poorly Aligned Decision—In Retrospect
- ◆ Details—Implementation of 2020 Vision

Sustainable Recreation Strategy



Contents of Parts 3 & 4



PART THREE—FINANCIAL STRATEGY

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Budget Allocation
- ◆ Glide Path
- ◆ Major Project Funding
- ◆ Regional Priority Investment List
- ◆ Major Visitor Centers
- ◆ Additional Financial Strategies
- ◆ Approval
- ◆ Appendices

PART FOUR—COMMUNICATIONS, COLLABORATION, and CONVERSATION STRATEGY

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Five Communication Goals Four
- ◆ Key Themes and Messages
- ◆ Internal and External Audiences
- ◆ Communication Tools and Products
- ◆ Timeline
- ◆ Leader's Guide to Communicating Change
- ◆ Conversations with Leadership Teams
- ◆ COMMUNICATION TOOLS
- ◆ Early Alert Protocol
- ◆ Early Alert Protocol: Sample Briefing Paper
- ◆ Talking Points
- ◆ Sample News Release
- ◆ Sample Action Plan
- ◆ Sample Response to Incoming Letter or Email
- ◆ Sample One-Page Handout
- ◆ Infographic –Busted: 4 Sustainable Recreation Myths
- ◆ Poster: Recreation That Lasts
- ◆ Elevator Speech
- ◆ Digital Media Tools, Ideas, and Tips
- ◆ Frequently Asked Questions for All Audiences
- ◆ Frequently Asked Questions for Employees



*NOTE: Part 4 is still in draft
and subject to change*



Contents of Part 5

PART FIVE—TREND TRACKER

- ◆ Introduction
- ◆ Key Accomplishments in FY 15

TRAILS

- ◇ To what extent does the current trail system meet agency standards?
- ◇ How has the trail system changed over the past year?
- ◇ What are the unmet needs of the current trail system?
- ◇ To what extent is trails planning occurring?
- ◇ Are trail condition surveys and trail bridge inspections being completed in a timely manner?

RECREATION SITES

- ◇ To what extent are recreation sites being maintained to standard?
- ◇ How much deferred maintenance exists?
- ◇ Has the amount of infrastructure associated with recreation sites changed over the past year?
- ◇ To what extent are shooting ranges being managed to meet agency standards?
- ◇ To what extent is developed site recreation planning occurring?
- ◇ Are site condition surveys and annual safety inspections being completed in a timely manner?
- ◇ To what extent are recreation facilities meeting accessibility standards?
- ◇ To what extent are recreation sites available on the National Recreation Reservation System?

FINANCIAL INDICATORS

- ◇ What are the trends in fee collections?
- ◇ What are the trends in year end fee revenue balances?
- ◇ Were regionally funded projects completed in a timely manner?

SPECIAL USES

- ◇ How many recreation special use permits are we issuing each year?
- ◇ Have there been changes in the site operator of developed recreation

HERITAGE

- ◇ sites? Is the Heritage program being managed to standard?
- ◇ What is the status of our priority heritage assets?
- ◇ To what extent is Heritage program planning occurring?
- ◇ To what extent is Heritage training occurring?

WILDERNESS

- ◇ To what extent are Wilderness areas being managed to meet agency standards?
- ◇ To what extent has Wilderness baseline character been established?
- ◇ To what extent have line officers and staff attended Wilderness training?
- ◇ To what extent have boundaries been surveyed and marked?

WILD and SCENIC RIVERS

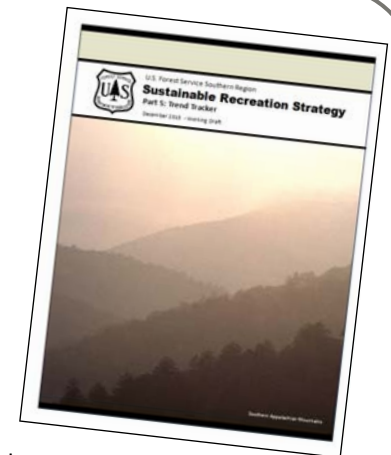
- ◇ To what extent are Wild and Scenic Rivers being managed to meet agency standards?
- ◇ To what extent are comprehensive river management plans complete?
- ◇ To what extent have line officers and staff attended Wild and Scenic River training?
- ◇ To what extent has a final map been prepared and legal descriptions completed?

VOLUNTEER and SERVICE PROGRAMS

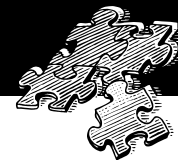
- ◇ How many volunteer hours were contributed by program area?
- ◇ To what extent are Public Land Corps Service Programs being used?

MISCELLANEOUS

- ◇ Has the scenery management system been implemented on the forest?
- ◇ To what extent are we providing quality visitor information?
- ◇ To what extent are we restoring degraded recreation settings?



NOTE: Part 5, Trend Tracker, is still in draft and subject to change



The Southern Region's 5 Critical Success Factors

