

The Forest Service's 2012 Forest Planning Rule



What Is a Forest Plan?

- ▶ Plans set the overall management direction and guidance for each of our national forests.
- ▶ Plans do not provide site-specific direction, such as where to put a recreation trail, but instead guide management activities at a forest-wide scale, providing direction for all uses across all lands within the national forests.
- ▶ A forest plan is similar to a city or county comprehensive plan that helps guide land use and development. Just like your town or city is planned to designate where particular uses (such as industrial and residential uses) may occur, national forests are planned in a similar fashion.
- ▶ The overarching purpose of the plan is to ensure that national forests are sustainably managed for generations to come.

What is the 2012 Planning Rule?

- ▶ The 2012 Planning Rule is the Federal regulation that sets out the procedures and required content for forest plans.
- ▶ This Rule is the first significant update to Forest Service planning procedures in 30 years, reflecting decades of experience and lessons learned.
- ▶ The 2012 Planning Rule provides a comprehensive set direction the Forest Service must follow during the forest planning process.

What is Unique About the 2012 Planning Rule? - continued

▶ Emphasizes the Role of Science -

- ▶ *Requires* the use of best available scientific information (BASI) to inform planning and plan decisions.
- ▶ BASI does not solely consist of Forest Service information - Tribal and State agency information may also be part of the BASI
- ▶ BASI may include Traditional Ecological Knowledge
 - ▶ The 2012 Planning Rule represents one of the first federal regulations to specifically recognize TEK and its role in management and planning

What is Unique About the 2012 Planning Rule?

- **Emphasizes Public Participation**
 - ▶ *Requires* outreach to and inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including people who have not participated in the planning process before.
 - ▶ Engaging with the public at all phases of the planning process.
 - ▶ Ensuring that the public is involved in the development (and not just the review) of plans.



What is Unique About the 2012 Planning Rule? - continued

- ▶ **Emphasizes Adaptive Management**
 - ▶ A structured, cyclical process for planning and decision-making in the face of uncertainty and changing conditions.
 - ▶ Encompasses the three phases of planning: assessment, plan development, and monitoring.
 - ▶ Includes using the planning process to actively test assumptions, track relevant conditions over time, and measure management effectiveness.



Species of Conservation Concern

Why It Matters

- ▶ National forests are home to more than 3,500 rare and sensitive species.
- ▶ A species of conservation concern is a plant or animal that has been identified for planning, management, and monitoring attention due to scientific information indicating substantial concerns about its ability to persist on the national forest over time.

Process

- ▶ The Forest Service will work with the general public, State fish and wildlife agencies, local governments, federally recognized tribes, the scientific community, and other stakeholders to gather information to develop a list of potential species of conservation concern.
- ▶ Final species of conservation concern will be determined by the Regional Forester using criteria from the Planning Rule and carried forward from the assessment process and become the subject of planning efforts.
- ▶ The conservation needs of these species can be provided through either ecosystem-scale plan components, or by plan components tailored specifically for an individual species, if necessary.
- ▶ Species of conservation concern monitoring may occur at both the forest level, and through a broad-scale monitoring program, which may occur at a multi-forest level.

Forests and Timber Management

Why It Matters

- ▶ Many national forests face serious threats from catastrophic fires, insect epidemics, and disease. Approximately 65 million acres of the national forests are at high or very high risk of catastrophic fires.
- ▶ Properly managed, sustainable timber harvest can contribute to meeting forest plan desired conditions and objectives for vegetation, forest and watershed health, and wildlife habitat.
- ▶ Sustainable timber harvests contribute to the economic vitality of the local community.

Process

- ▶ As part of the forest planning process for each national forest, the Forest Service will analyze current forest conditions; describe the desired conditions for the plan area; state objectives to achieve those desired conditions; and identify the lands in the plan area that are suitable for timber production.
- ▶ The Forest Plan will include: Determination of lands suitable for timber production, establish desired conditions for each forest type and determining projected timber outputs, including expected and maximum outputs, with comparisons to biologically potential outputs.
- ▶ The monitoring program will provide information on the effectiveness of forest plan direction, including: Progress toward desired forest conditions and projected timber outputs

Wilderness

Why It Matters

- ▶ Wilderness areas are important for many reasons. They often provide scenic landscapes, high quality water, and good habitat for many wildlife species such as elk and bear. For those who like to “get away from it all,” wilderness areas can be great places to go hiking, backpacking, and hunting.

Process

- ▶ During the assessment, the Forest Service will gather information about existing wilderness areas and opportunities, and the need for additional wilderness. They will also begin to update or develop their inventory of lands that may be suitable for wilderness designation.
- ▶ The Forest Service will present its findings and preliminary wilderness recommendations (if any) in the proposed plan and draft environmental impact statement. The public will have at least 90 days to review and comment on the Forest Service’s proposal.
- ▶ If the forest plan recommends an area for wilderness, it will include plan components to ensure the protection and maintenance of the characteristics that made it suitable for wilderness designation.

Objections Process

Why it Matters

- ▶ The Forest Service developed a new process to allow for objections and interested parties to dialogue with the reviewing officer to ensure that the best balance of needs is reached.

Process

- ▶ The deciding officer issues a final EIS and a draft decision to the public.
- ▶ Stakeholders who have participated throughout the NEPA process review and if they move forward, they can obtain official standing in one of two ways:
 - ▶ Official Objector Status - the stakeholder has submitted comments on the forest plan and has objections specifically related to the submitted comments.
 - ▶ Interested Person Status - must file a request to participate in an objection within days after publication of the notice of objection.
- ▶ Objections must be filed within 60 days of the publication date and notice for the plan EIS
 - ▶ For and amendment that is not an EIS, the objection period is 45 days.
- ▶ The reviewing officer and forest staff will work with the objectors and interested parties to put together a resolution process for the parties.

Questions?