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USDA FOREST SERVICE LAUNCHES COLLABORATIVE PROCESS FOR NEW PLANNING RULE

WASHINGTON, Dec. 17, 2009—Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that the USDA Forest Service is beginning an open, collaborative process to create and implement a modern planning rule to address current and future needs of the National Forest System, including restoring forests, protecting watersheds, addressing climate change, sustaining local economies, improving collaboration, and working across landscapes. The Forest Service will publish a notice of intent (NOI) in the Federal Register tomorrow, December 18, to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to develop a new planning rule that will provide a framework for management of national forests and grasslands.

“Our National Forests and Grasslands are great natural treasures that we must conserve and restore for the benefit of future generations,” said Secretary Vilsack. “Developing a new planning rule provides the opportunity to manage national forests and grasslands for the benefit of water resources, the climate and local communities.”

The Forest Service is seeking public involvement in developing a new direction for local land managers. A 60-day comment period on the NOI will begin upon publication in the Federal Register on Friday, December 18, 2009. Comments will be used to shape the focus of the collaborative dialogue and creation of a proposed rule.

To begin the conversation, the Forest Service has included in the NOI a set of potential principles that could guide development of a new planning rule. The potential principles include an emphasis on restoration, conservation, and the improved resilience of ecosystems; watershed health; climate change response; species diversity and wildlife habitat; sustainable National Forest System lands; proactive collaboration; and working across landscapes.

The Forest Service will use state-of-the-art new media tools in conjunction with face-to-face interaction to facilitate wide public participation throughout the nation. Please visit www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule to participate in our web-based planning rule blog, and to learn more.

The 2000 planning rule, which allows the Forest Service to use provisions of the 1982 planning rule, is currently the rule that is legally in effect. As an interim measure, the Department will republish in the Federal Register the 2000 planning rule as amended in order to make it available to the public in the Code of Federal Regulations. This action will facilitate its use by forests and grasslands in the National Forest System to revise and amend plans while a new rule is being developed.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service 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 agency manages the 193 million acres of National Forest System land, provides stewardship

assistance to non-federal forest landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

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