

Draft Approach for People and the Environment for the Proposed Planning Rule
as posted on the Planning Rule Blog on 7/23/10 - <http://planningrule.blogs.usda.gov>

People and the environment—communities and their landscapes—are inseparable and interdependent. People throughout America depend on National Forest System (NFS system) lands including national forests, grasslands and prairies for innumerable values, ecosystem services and goods vital to the well-being of society.

Even those who live some distance from a national forest boundary, for example, benefit from the clean water, clean air, flood and erosion control, forest products, diverse economic opportunities, habitats for fish and wildlife species, cultural and historical sites, and beautiful natural places for recreation and spiritual rejuvenation provided by NFS lands.

We heard from our publics that they want the planning rule to recognize the importance of multiple uses and the economic and social values provided by NFS lands while balancing those benefits among local, regional and national interests and the long term health and productivity of the land. We recommend that the 2011 planning rule specifically acknowledge and reinforce the linkages between people and the environment by requiring meaningful **collaboration** with local governments, tribes, States, other Federal agencies, and other stakeholders across the country to conduct land management planning that leads to a sustainable ecological-social-economic system.

Why is acknowledging and understanding the values NFS lands provide (social, cultural, and economic contributions) such a vital part of the 2011 planning rule?

People connect to the land in different ways, and they have **differing, often conflicting, interests and opinions** on what's best for their community and their needs. And with increasing urbanization, globalization, and **changing values and concerns**, we will see shifts in how people interact with NFS lands in the future. To determine and understand the needs of people and to figure out the best courses of action, every phase of NFS land management planning must provide opportunities to collaborate. It's a complex task.

Some counties might depend heavily on ecosystem services provided by NFS, like fresh water for public drinking supplies, while others may depend on the Forest Service for other public health and safety needs, like reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfire or removal of hazardous trees. Some local economies are bolstered by drawing tourists to view the beautiful natural scenery, hike or fish, enjoy solitude, watch wildlife or engage in other kinds of outdoor recreation; while others might be more dependent on products like timber or minerals, or on restoration based jobs from NFS lands. Still others may depend on the increased quality of life provided by the FS and NFS lands to attract new residents or businesses to the area, expand educational or job opportunities for youth, or increase the health and vitality of neighboring residents. Others may depend on NFS resources for subsistence. Indian tribes connect with the land in special ways. Many people, across the country and around the world, seek opportunities for spiritual, educational, and cultural sustenance and refreshment, and depend on having access to our lands for those experiential values.

So it's critical that our collaborative efforts proactively engage diverse views, cultures, and sources of knowledge. Only when we consider local, national and long term needs can we craft plans that consider shared goals across **all lands**, and that reinforce the linkages between people and the environment. People need to know that they are a vital part of the effort to sustain healthy, productive, diverse, and **resilient** NFS lands for current and future generations, and see that by doing so, we sustain those values, products and benefits on which so many people, near and far, depend.

How would the 2011 rule actively consider the multiple values NFS lands provide?

Assessments to determine the need for plan changes would look not only at the conditions and trends of the environment but also the linkages between landscapes and communities. Responsible officials would proactively reduce barriers to participation and develop relationships among stakeholders, to foster an understanding of the roles and social economic contributions of NFS lands within the broader landscape. Assessments would review existing social and economic assessments at appropriate geographic scales, such as statewide comprehensive outdoor recreation plans and forest assessments, as well as county and tribal management plans. Assessments may highlight the distinctive roles and contributions of the planning unit(s) to provide multiple uses and cultural uses, opportunities for solitude and diverse recreation settings, aesthetic values, economic and employment opportunities, and other ecosystem services and benefits from NFS lands to the local area, State, region, and Nation. They may identify vulnerabilities in the social-economic-ecological systems related to the NFS unit. They also may identify types of management activities that are likely to yield the greatest benefit for the land while providing economic and social values to society. Assessments would recognize that people from local communities, across the nation and literally around the world derive benefits and quality experiences from NFS lands.

Again, the goal is to design a workable, practical, and achievable approach to understanding and responding to the needs of the communities and people—near and far—who depend on values NFS lands provide. Managers of each unit would work with the public to identify what information could be the most useful in informing the need for change and direction of proposed plan amendments or revisions.

To **revise or amend** a plan, we would collaboratively develop desired conditions and objectives, taking into account the social and economic contributions of the unit along with the health of the environment. The Forest Service is committed to connecting people with the environment through responsible land management planning. Together we would clearly identify suitable uses and the types of management activities, plans, and infrastructure systems necessary to support those uses. For instance, plans may identify suitability of uses including the extent, type and mix of sustainable recreation opportunities (motorized and non-motorized), as well as the associated suitable and sustainable facilities and transportation systems for air, land, and water. Plans would recognize the requirements of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act. Plans may include desired

conditions and objectives that capitalize on opportunities to restore resilient ecosystems or increase the health of the land while providing economic benefits to communities.

When **monitoring** we would proactively create opportunities for partners and publics to collaborate in developing and implementing the monitoring program. We would work with the public to identify the conditions, trends, and status of representative social-economic indicators for opportunities, values, benefits, settings, and uses—at both the local and landscape level—that would best answer questions related to management and to test assumptions made during the assessment and revise phases of the planning framework. For example, we would work with local governments and other interested stakeholders to track recreation use trends and visitor satisfaction to determine whether the recreation objectives in the plan are achieved. Data would be made public, and the unit would periodically evaluate monitoring results and share those evaluations with partners and stakeholders to build understanding of how NFS land and management activities are contributing to the social, cultural and economic well being of local, regional and national communities. Information from monitoring will be evaluated to determine whether there is new information or changed conditions that would trigger further assessment.

So, is there a catch?

As we mention above, and as many of you have seen in your home areas and through this planning process, the Forest Service has a diverse group of interested publics who often have different, and sometimes conflicting, sets of interests and needs relative to National Forest System Lands. The National Forest System cannot be all things to all people, all the time and on every unit, and our intent here is **not** to commit managers to meet every identified need, or to conform management to achieve non-NFS goals. As mentioned elsewhere, it is important to remember that the Forest Service retains the responsibility and authority for making final decisions, using judgment and acting consistently with forest plans, laws, regulations, and the public interest.

Our intent **is** to ensure that the social, cultural and economic contexts for management within the broader landscape are well understood, and are considered as part of the planning framework and process. This includes understanding how people are using our lands; the values, services and benefits they are deriving from our lands; how demands for uses or values are changing over time; and how we are contributing to those needs. By specifically acknowledging and reinforcing the linkages between people and the environment, and especially by requiring meaningful **collaboration** with local governments, tribes, States, other Federal agencies, and other stakeholders across the country, we hope to design a process that leads to and supports sustainable ecological-social-economic systems.

Please comment on this draft approach on the Planning Rule Blog at <http://planningrule.blogs.usda.gov>.