



# U.S. Forest Service

## Summary of the Proposed Planning Rule

**Date:** February 10, 2011



The proposed rule would provide a framework to guide the collaborative and science-based development, amendment and revision of land management plans that promote healthy, resilient, diverse and productive national forests and grasslands. The Agency's goal is to create a planning framework that would guide management of National Forest System (NFS) lands so they are ecologically sustainable and contribute to social and economic sustainability. Planning would support resilient ecosystems and watersheds, diverse plant and animal communities, and the capacity of the NFS to provide people and communities with a range of social, economic and ecological benefits now and for future generations.

The proposed framework for the planning process consists of a three-part cycle: assessment, plan revision or amendment and monitoring. These phases of the planning process are complementary and are intended to allow the Forest Service to adapt management to changing conditions and to improve plans with more frequent amendments based on new information and monitoring.

The proposed rule would strengthen the role of public involvement in the planning process and provide numerous opportunities for meaningful public participation and dialogue. The proposed rule would require that the best available scientific information be taken into account and documented. The planning process would also take into account other forms of knowledge, such as local information, national perspectives, and native knowledge. Ideas, resources, and knowledge would be shared with all interests, individuals, and groups throughout the planning process.

The planning process would require developing an understanding of the landscape-scale context for unit-level management. Assessments, in particular, are designed to create an understanding of conditions, trends, and stressors both on and off NFS lands in order to guide the development of plans to manage resources on the unit. The proposed rule has requirements in each phase for working with the public, partners, landowners, other government agencies, and Tribes, and would require the responsible official to identify each unit's unique roles and contributions to the local area, region, and Nation.

The proposed rule includes requirements for plan content. In the face of changing environmental conditions such as climate change, plans would include plan components to maintain or restore ecosystem and watershed health and resilience; protect key ecosystem elements, including water resources on the unit; and provide for plant and animal diversity. In doing so, responsible officials would take into account the various stressors or impacts, including climate change, that could affect the presence and function of ecological resources on the unit. Plan components would also be required to protect cultural and historic resources and specially designated areas (such as wilderness areas and wild and scenic rivers).

Plans would also include plan components to contribute to social and economic sustainability, thereby supporting vibrant communities and rural job opportunities. Planning would consider the full suite of multiple uses of a plan area, including watershed, wildlife and fish, outdoor recreation,

grazing, timber, energy, minerals, wilderness, ecosystem services, and other relevant resources, uses and values. Plan components would be required to provide for sustainable recreation on land, water and in the air.

The proposed rule creates a two-tiered strategy for monitoring at the unit level and at a broader scale. Monitoring would be a central part of both plan content and the planning process, allowing responsible officials to test assumptions, track changing conditions, measure management implementation and effectiveness in achieving desired outcomes, and feed new information back into the planning cycle so that plans and management can be changed as needed.

Finally, the proposed rule would create a pre-decisional administrative review process to provide individuals and groups with an opportunity to resolve issues before final approval of a plan, plan amendment or plan revision.

- The Forest Service is asking the public to provide comments on the proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). The comment period is open for 90 days and will not close until May 16, 2011.
- Additional information about the Proposed Planning Rule is available electronically at: <http://fs.usda.gov/planningrule>.
- Information about how to submit a comment about the Proposed Rule is available electronically at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/planningrule/HowToComment>.