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Black Hills National Forest

Draft Forest Assessment:

Land Status, Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns



Black Hills National Forest

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Chapter 1. Introduction

The Black Hills National Forest (Black Hills NF or BKNF) is managed by the U.S. Forest Service, an agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The mission of the 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 National Forest Management Act requires all National Forests to develop a land and resource management plan (forest plan) to guide management actions and decisions. The current Black Hills NF forest plan was approved in 1997 and has been amended twice, in 2001 and 2005. The National Forest Management Act requires that these forest plans be periodically updated. To revise the current forest plan, the Black Hills NF has identified and evaluated existing information about relevant ecological, economic, and social conditions, trends, and sustainability and how those conditions relate to management direction in the forest plan. This preliminary draft assessment report documents findings for aquatic, riparian, and groundwater dependent ecosystems.

Resource Overview

This document is an assessment of the current known land status, ownership, use, and access patterns in the Black Hills NF, or the “plan area” and how management of the plan area may influence land use and access in the plan area and beyond.

Chapter 2. Resource Assessment

Importance

The key issues related to land status and ownership, use, and access patterns within the plan area are prioritizing lands for acquisition or disposal to best meet the needs of the forest and adjacent communities within budget constraints. Other key issues include accessing BKNF lands with increasing development on private inholdings, ensuring that non-recreation special uses minimally encumber the forest, and allowing important economic development, and resolving trespasses and encroachments in the plan area. Related issues identified in the previous forest plan include:

- Timber management,
- Off-highway vehicle management,
- Fire hazards and communities at risk,
- Social and economic sustainability for local communities (including job opportunities/workforce advancement),
- Forest access, including access to sacred and cultural sites,
- Grazing, rangeland, and forage management, and
- Mining (and impacts).

Current Condition

Land Status and Ownership

Land status is the zoning for private lands and formal management status of public lands. Land ownership is the basic pattern of public and private ownership of both surface and subsurface estates. The Black Hills NF contains numerous private, residential, and tourism-related inholdings (table 1) and is one of the most developed forested areas in the nation. Of the more than 1.5 million acres within the administrative boundary of the National Forest, approximately 286,000 acres are in private, state, or other federal agency ownership. Lands managed by the Forest Service are referred to as National Forest System lands. The towns of Custer, Hill City, Keystone, Lead and Deadwood are all entirely contained within the administrative Forest boundary. Other federal and state lands within Black Hills NF include Custer State Park, Mount Rushmore National Memorial, Wind Cave National Park, Mickelson Trail, and Jewel Cave National Monument.

Black Hills NF is managed by four Ranger Districts (RD). Bearlodge Ranger District, headquartered in Sundance, Wyoming, encompasses over 200,000 acres in the northern portion of the Black Hills and is the only Ranger District of the Black Hills NF located in Wyoming. The 375,000-acre Northern Hills Ranger District is also located in the northern portion of the Forest, but in the state of South Dakota with headquarters in Spearfish, SD. The remaining two districts are also located in South Dakota and include the 357,300-acre Mystic Ranger District found in the central section of the Black Hills and the Hell Canyon Ranger District which manages approximately 600,000 acres in the southern portion of the Forest.

Table 1. Acres of non-NFS and NFS lands within the plan area

[NFS, National Forest System. Source: USDA Forest Service 2020.]

Ranger District	Non-NFS	NFS	Total
Bearlodge (Sundance, WY)	26,616	175,864	202,480
Hell Canyon (Custer, SD)	150,940	450,402	601,341
Mystic (Rapid City, SD)	47,039	310,219	357,258
Northern Hills (Spearfish, SD)	61,703	313,837	375,540
Total	286,297	1,250,322	1,536,619

As shown on Map 1 (Appendix A), there is a complicated and intermingled pattern of public and private lands in and around the plan area. Wildlife habitats and migration corridors may be fragmented by buildings, fences, access roads, utility lines, and other infrastructure on private property. Maintaining habitat connectivity requires working with adjacent private landowners and other agencies as there are currently no conservation easements on National Forest System lands to restrict development and decrease fragmentation, but there are some within the administrative boundary. The Black Hills NF works with several non-governmental organizations (NGO) that work with private landowners to establish conservation easements. These NGOs include The Nature Conservancy, The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, The Trust for Public Land, The Conservation Fund, and Northern Prairies Land Trust. Currently there are no conservation easements on National Forest System lands, but there are some within the administrative boundary (table 2).

Table 2. Acreage of conservation easements

Conservation Easement	Acres
Cheyenne River Canyons Easement	8,411
Circle Z Land Company	7
Forest Service Region 02 - Rocky Mountain Region Conservation Easement	0
Grasslands Reserve Program (GRP)	309
Mount Rushmore National Memorial	1
Wind Cave National Park	3
Wyoming Stock Growers Land Trust Easement	1,857
Total	10,588

Land Access

Access is the ability to move to, from, or through the plan area by any means including pedestrian access from properties adjacent to the plan area. The plan area is accessed by several secondary U.S. and State Highways, as well as numerous county roads, National Forest System roads, and trails. Interstate 90 is a main access route, which borders the Forest and crosses from west to east along the northeastern edge of the Black Hills. Other major access routes include Highway 85, which provides access to the northwest section of the Forest, entering on the west and exiting on the north. Highway 385 roughly bisects the plan area from north to south and Highway 16 provides access from east to west. These highways provide access to the National Forest System roads, which connect to other public roads managed by a variety of jurisdictions. Miles of roads and associated density (road miles per square mile) within the Forest are listed by jurisdiction in table 3.

Table 3. Miles of road by jurisdiction

Jurisdiction	Miles of Road
Bureau of Land Management	1
County	104
Federal Aviation Administration	1
Local	1
Private	23
State	1
State Highway	37

Forest Service Road Core (2021) and Travel Management Rule, requires any roads, trails, and areas that are to be open to motor vehicle use on a National Forest be officially designated by class of vehicle and by season of use. In response to this rule, the BKNF designated certain roads and trails as reflected on the motor vehicle use map found in the *Recreation Assessment* to reflect current and anticipated travel needs, offer a variety of recreational opportunities, and provide for administrative access, while balancing the physical, biological, and social attributes of the Forest.

The current designation as approved in the 2010 Record of Decision on the BKNF Travel Management Plan, provides 3,466 miles of roads including 2,226 miles of motorized-mixed-use roads; boosts motorized trails to 663 miles; and limits cross-country motorized use to a portion of the BKNF only for the purposes of game retrieval (elk only) or dispersed camping.

There are thousands of miles of unauthorized routes on the Forest, including both roads and trails (USFS, 2010). Some were used for forest management activities on a temporary basis. Users adopted these routes over time and have used them, in some cases, for decades. Other routes are user-created. These routes were developed by repeated driving cross-country on the same path winding through the trees or across openings. User-created routes have not been designed by engineers and are sometimes situated in poor locations on the landscape, often resulting in adverse impacts to soil, water, riparian and other wildlife habitat, cultural and other resources. The Forest Service allows administrative access sufficient to carry out official business including but not limited to conducting resource surveys, administering contracts and permits, suppressing wildfires or addressing other such emergencies, maintaining roads and other facilities, etc. Access is also allowed to contractors and permit holders operating within the terms and scope of their contract or permit, to conduct Government-related business. This specifically includes, but is not limited to, commercial traffic such as timber sale purchasers, road contractors, and those holding special use and livestock grazing permits. Reasonable administrative access is allowed as appropriate for other local, State and Federal agencies to manage their adjacent or isolated parcels.

If an authorized road or OHV is needed for timber or fuels management or fire suppression, all public use may be suspended or could even be permanently discontinued. Substitute routes may be designated.

The Forest works cooperatively with landowners to maintain access, while improving Forest access, through increased rights-of-way acquisitions with a goal to acquire approximately 25 right-of way across non- National Forest System lands each year.

The Forest has hundreds of miles of hiking trails ranging in length and difficulty. The Mickelson Trail provides access through the western half of the Forest from Deadwood to Edgemont, while the Centennial Trail spans the eastern side of the Forest, from Bear Butte State Park to just north of Wind Cave National Park Trails (non-motorized and motorized are discussed in the *Recreation Assessment*).

Land Use

Land use is the current use of land, such as residential, commercial, industrial, or agricultural use. The current Black Hills NF forest plan subdivides the forest into eight general categories to better define management goals for similar areas, such as those that see extensive human use (Category 8) to those that are relatively undisturbed (Category 1). Management depends on the category in which the area lies, but overall management strategies allow a variety of uses ranging from wilderness and research areas to lands designated for off-road vehicle use and camping. Resource extraction such as timber and minerals are also permitted, although to a lesser extent and only when it aligns with management goals. A general Land Use Map is included as Map 1 in Appendix A of this document.

The Forest Service authorizes a wide variety of public and private uses on National Forest System lands through special-use authorizations, the most common being Federal Land Policy and Management Act permits and easements. These authorizations give holders varying degrees of property interests on National Forest System lands. Many special-use authorizations involve activities related to recreation (e.g., outfitting and guiding, OHV use, and recreation residences) and are addressed in the *Preliminary Draft Recreation* assessment. Other special-use authorizations involve non-recreation infrastructure upgrades such as utilities and communications, specifically fiber optic cable, electrical services (buried and overhead), broadband and communications towers and water transmission lines for domestic use.

Trends

Land Status and Ownership Trends

Currently there are approximately 287,000 acres of private inholdings within the administrative boundary of the Forest and applications for development on private lands are increasing, especially along the corridors within Boulder Canyon, along U.S. Highway 85 in the northern Hills, the Hill City area, along Sheridan Lake Road near Rapid City, and along Highways 385, 44, and 16.

The presence of infrastructure in and adjacent to the plan area, particularly buildings, bridges, utilities, and communication sites, affects fire management decisions dramatically. First, these facilities require protection from wildfires, which may take the form of pre-fire fuels reduction efforts, defensive suppression tactics during a wildfire, or the selection of tactics and strategies for specific wildfires that would be different if the infrastructure were not present. Fire is a key ecosystem disturbance process on much of the Black Hills NF landscape, but the presence of infrastructure in some locations reduces the capability of fire managers to utilize fire in its natural role in those locations, i.e., managing wildfires to obtain resource benefits often poses too much risk to adjacent infrastructure. As a result, more aggressive suppression strategies that limit the extent of fire on the landscape both spatially and temporally are often selected over less aggressive management tactics that would allow fire to burn more naturally, and with lower suppression costs.

The Black Hills NF may seek to acquire isolated tracts of land within the Forest for management purposes. Recent examples of land acquisition since the last plan update in 1997 include a land-to-land exchange between the USDA Forest Service, the Black Hills National Forest, and Capstone Properties, LLC on April 19, 2006, to exchange 97 acres of federal land for 120 acres of non-federal land known as Greyhound Gulch within Pennington County, SD.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has purchased over 2,700 acres from private inholdings since 2007 (table 4), including a 2,400-acre purchase of Lady C Ranch during 2007-2011. Most recent purchases include a Trust for Public Land (TPL) purchase of Spring Creek Watershed in 2019 and a Nature Conservancy (TNC) purchase of Slate Creek in 2012, which was considered a critical inholding.

Table 4. Land and Water Conservation Fund project recent acquisitions

Project Name	Acres	\$ Amount	Year
Lady C Phase I	280	840,000	2007
Lady C Phase II	200	600,000	2007
Lady C Phase III	330	990,000	2008
Lady C Phase IV	170	510,000	2008
Lady C Phase V	577.50	1,732,500	2009
Lady C Phase VI	557.50	1,803,358	2010
Lady C Phase VII	285	670,000	2011
Slate Creek (TNC)	10.33	77,500	2012
Spring Creek Watershed (TPL)	349.38	1,739,000	2019

The Black Hills Land Claim Movement to return indigenous land to indigenous ownership has resulted in ongoing land disputes with Native Tribes (Brys 2021). The Native American Sioux Nation purchased 1,942 acres of the Black Hills NF in November 2012, which included the sacred Pe' Sla site. An additional 437 acres adjacent to this property was purchased in 2014.

Access Trends

Information regarding types and allowances of road and trail access are found in primarily in two companion assessments: *Recreation Settings, Opportunities, and Scenic Character* and *Infrastructure*.

Cross-country travel on the Forest has increased over time as off-highway vehicles, all-terrain vehicles and motorcycles have become more popular forms of recreational travel. In addition to cross-country travel, users often employed routes created from timber sales or mining activities to traverse the countryside and avoid the main road systems. These routes were closed after management activities using vegetation or closure devices to discourage motorized travel and were never considered part of the overall transportation system for the Forest. They are referred to as unauthorized routes. As off-highway travel became more popular, these unauthorized routes were discovered and “adopted” by the public as motorized riding opportunities. In addition to management-created unauthorized routes, user-created routes have also developed from continuous use by the public. These routes were often not designed to professional standards but formed as a motorized vehicle continuously traversed the ground creating tire ruts in the soil.

Unauthorized roads in the Forest are also formed as unauthorized driveways to private property, and more are formed every year especially around the urban interface areas that are easy to reach by road. The Forest Service works actively with landowners to submit a special use authorization proposal/application to authorize use and occupancy of National Forest System land in order to access property.

Many of the hiking trails within the Forest (especially the more primitive trails) are seldom used by visitors. Some of the reasons for non-use in more primitive trails is the lack of publicity for these areas and reduced maintenance to these areas. If this pattern continues, the Forest will continue to see a widening difference between the visitor use on a select few destinations compared to the rest of the Forest. Additional information on non-motorized and motorized trails are discussed in the *Assessment: Recreation Settings, Opportunities, and Scenic Character*. There is a general increase in demand for all non-recreation special uses across the forest resulting in increased access requests via special permits. Utility companies (specifically broadband fiber optic) have been increasing due to federal programs and funding sources to bring broadband to rural communities. With the boom in land sales,

water transmission line permits, and the creation of subdivisions, the Black Hills NF has seen an increase in the request for access on non-system roads as well as requests to plow snow on open system roads.

Some areas of the forest, such as the 1,397-acre Inyan Kara Sacred Site, are surrounded by private land, and the Forest Service has no permanent right-of-way access. Obtaining permanent access is a Black Hills NF objective.

Area tribal concerns with land access often involves access to Sacred Sites to practice traditional ceremonies and harvest resource materials such as tipi poles and native plants. However, the current definition of Sacred Sites often does not always represent the Indigenous point of view. Tribes do not always view sacred areas as having boundaries or a defined area on a map, so using the terms “property or site” may not accurately describe these sacred landscapes. Some alternatives to the word traditional cultural property to be considered would be a traditional cultural area or a sacred area. The word “area” is not as restrictive as saying “property,” and it is a better description that can encompass an important/sacred landscape instead of constricting an important area to one specific place.

The act of listing a traditional cultural property on the National Register of Historic Places can be complicated. There are many instances where Tribes do not want to disclose confidential information. They may not want to disclose information for many reasons, some of these being distrust; they do not want the Forest Service to know; and they do not want these areas brought to the public’s attention, etc.

How the Forest protects and manages sacred places and places of traditional importance to Tribes should be reevaluated for the forest plan. For example, viewing sacred places within the confines of the current definitions of a traditional cultural property and/or sacred site may not fully consider the Indigenous cultural perspective and their ties to these sacred areas. Tribal nations pass down the knowledge that culturally important areas are sacred, and that these areas do not always have boundaries defining where a sacred area begins or ends. The current process of designating a traditional cultural property may not work with Tribal views and can create conflict with government-to-government consultations, adding to the difficulty of listing a traditional cultural property on the National Register of Historic Places. For further information on sacred sites, please refer to the *Cultural Resource Assessment*.

Use Trends

US Forest Service lands are guided by the 1960 Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act. This law states that national forests should be managed for all the various resources, such as timber, minerals, grazing, water, recreation, and wildlife, in a manner where all resources are regarded equally and in perpetuity without impairment of the resource productivity. Therefore, mineral entry is allowed within the Black Hills NF, as evidenced by current and proposed projects in the area such as the Kaliko Mining project and proposed expansion of the Virginia Mine, both in Hell Canyon Ranger District. Other examples include prospecting in previously mined areas in Mystic Ranger District, such as the Triple G/Rollo’s Roost Placer Mining project (USDA Forest Service 2021).

Lands that come into the National Forest System through purchase or donation take on acquired status and are not open to mineral entry under the 1873 Mining Laws. Additionally, lands acquired through purchase, exchange, or donation within Wilderness areas are not open to mineral permits or mining entry. Over 2,380 acres of land adjacent to Jewel Cave National Monument is under mineral withdrawal. A withdrawal is an action withholding an area of Federal land from settlement, sale, location, and/or entry under some or all the general land laws or mineral laws. Currently the Black Hills NF has a forest-wide goal to apply for mineral withdrawals to protect significant cave ecosystems and resources, research natural areas, and botanical areas.

The trend for use and occupancy of National Forest System land is on an upward trend and will most likely continue for an indeterminate amount of time.

Management

Land Ownership Influence

The Forest Service may seek to acquire lands to meet resource management objectives, including lands adjacent to designated wilderness, areas of outstanding scenic significance, and areas that contain threatened, endangered, or sensitive species habitat. Any lands that have lost their National Forest character, are isolated from the National Forest lands, or encumbered with substantial improvements will be considered for conveyance, or exchange for more desirable parcels that meet management objectives. Specifically, the Forest Service pursues land ownership adjustment through purchase, sale, exchange, or donation per criteria in Guidelines 8101 through 8104 of the Black Hills NF Land and Resource Management Plan Phase II Amendment and strives to improve Forest access through increased rights-of-way acquisition.

Access Influence

Per the Black Hills NF Land and Resource Management Plan, the Forest has an objective to maintain and increase roads to support long-term sustainable production of commodities, resource management, and recreation access while decreasing unauthorized roads. There is a trend toward fewer unauthorized roads and increased access is expanding through cooperation with private landowners.

Land Use Influence

The current forest plan is the primary influence for project-specific and resource specific management decisions. While the forest plan does not provide specifics, it does provide general direction to guide management activities on a forest wide scale, providing a consistent means to influence land use through identification of desired conditions, goals, objectives, standards, guidelines, and identification of the suitability of lands in the plan area for multiple uses (USDA Forest Service 2016).

The Black Hills NF can influence land use through the issuance of special use authorizations, by authorizing activities that are compatible with forest plan objectives while limiting their impact on forest health over the long term.

Actions of Others

Management Coordination Opportunities

Black Hills NF works closely with other government entities, partners, and stakeholders as appropriate to define complementary roles that best meet the needs of the forest. Coordination is conducted through communication with interested parties and organizations in the development of plans and projects (USDA Forest Service 2006).

Due to the unique interface of communities on the edge of the national forest, many local county governments identify the need to coordinating growth and development by maintaining strong partnerships with the forest service to provide public services in an efficient manner and protect natural resources and amenities. This level of close coordination should continue to occur and be further enhanced between those with jurisdiction in the county to provide public services and efficient development patterns.

Black Hills NF can also work with county governments to support responsible multiple uses of public lands and maintain high levels of environmental quality and minimize impacts to natural resources from

future growth and development. Specifically, cooperation between the agencies can help to reduce urban sprawl, promote education regarding access to natural areas, and encourage personal responsibility related to popular sites throughout the county.

As discussed above, land ownership adjustment activities can be used to continue to improve the environmental sustainability of land ownership, use, and access patterns by reducing private inholdings and limiting development in areas where it would negatively impact resources and constrain forest management options.

Chapter 3. Public Participation in the Planning Process

This section may have some placeholders until after the public has had chance to review the assessment reports and the Black Hills NF has completed other public engagement activities.

Public Interest

The most likely stakeholders to be affected by or interested in this topic are municipalities or communities within or adjacent to the plan area, owners of private land within or adjacent to the plan area concerned with access and special uses, or potentially interested in engaging in a land ownership adjustment proposal, and members of the public concerned with access to the plan area.

Future Involvement

Pending additional outreach, this section will answer how do stakeholders want to be informed about this topic as the planning process proceeds.

Public Information Needs

Pending additional outreach, this section will answer what is confusing to the public about this topic and what follow-up could improve understanding?

Chapter 4. Conclusions

Environmental Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

Development or uses of private land within the plan area may be compatible with the management goals of adjacent National Forest System lands, but can cause habitat fragmentation, promote the spread of invasive species, and contribute to sedimentation of waterbodies. In addition, fuels reduction projects such as prescribed burning and mechanical treatments are often prioritized immediately adjacent to private infrastructure to reduce future risk to those structures and improvements. This prioritization results in an inability to apply these tools to the extent needed at other locations for ecosystem restoration and fuels reduction.

Unauthorized roads in the Forest mentioned earlier in this assessment are not sustainable. These roads are usually unplanned and are likely to be poorly located, resulting in higher erosion potential.

Funding is not sufficient to perform all the maintenance necessary to upkeep the long-term conditions of all the roads and trails in the Black Hills NF, especially with the increase in off-highway vehicle (OHV) traffic causing additional damage to the area. Therefore, conditions may worsen, however revised forest plan direction could mitigate some of these potential impacts.

OHV use, and its associated impacts, are a priority issue. The Black Hills NF has many inholdings and a large amount of urban interface, which has expanded in recent years due to increased development adjacent to Forest lands. This has led to increased urgency for management activities in the urban interface, particularly timber, fuel, pest, and invasive species management.

Economic Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

As the Black Hills NF is a driver of economic opportunities in the local area, including timber harvesting, livestock grazing, and outdoor recreation. Across the seven-county area of influence, approximately 24 percent of the land is federally managed (USGS 2018). As a land manager in the area, Forest Service management actions have the potential to affect the future of these economic opportunities by maintaining access to the plan area. It is important to continue managing the forest under the guidance of the Multiple Use Sustained Yield Act to provide management equality for all the various resources within the Forest to protect the local economy and Forest resources. This is critical to sustaining local economies that rely on recreation, tourism, and resource development. These multiple uses and ecosystem services are discussed in the *Socioeconomic Assessment*, as well as other assessments. Funding and staff availability to pursue land purchases and right-of-way acquisitions to secure legal access are often limited.

Social Sustainability of Land Status and Ownership, Use, and Access Patterns

Landownership Adjustment and Rights-of Way Acquisition

The 2012 Planning Rule defines social sustainability as “the capability of society to support the network of relationships, traditions, culture, and activities that connect people to the land and to one another and support vibrant communities” (36 CFR §219.19).

The nation, and most counties in the seven-county area of influence experienced population increases between 2010 and 2019. However, some counties saw notably high population growth relative to other counties in the areas of influence. The seven-county area of influence had greater population growth (10.3 percent) than the U.S., South Dakota, and Wyoming (6.8, 8.9, and 6.5 percent, respectively). Pennington County, followed by Crook County and Meade County had the highest increases in population (13, 10.5, and 10.2 percent, respectively) (U.S. DOC2020a).

As populations grow, conflicts between local residents and forest visitors may increase. While living close to public lands may provide residents with amenities such as convenient access to recreation and wildlife viewing, increased forest congestion causes disadvantages such as crowds, litter, and noise (Garber-Yonts 2004, Bolitzer and Netusil 2000). As residential areas and populations surrounding the forest grow, the area's need for infrastructure increases, which may place greater pressure on the forest to provide, for example, utility rights-of-way. This type of pressure may threaten the forest's role in contributing to sense of place and the quality of life in surrounding communities (Stedman 2003). Homes located near forests (i.e., the wildland urban interface, or WUI) are at risk of wildfire-related disturbances. When populations around the forest expand, there are more homes in the WUI. There is greater risk to these growing communities from increased frequency and extent of wildfire due to climate change (Timberlake et al. 2021).

County comprehensive plans from the area of influence emphasize the importance of sustainable economic growth that provides diverse job opportunities, while protecting the rural character and natural amenities that characterize many communities in the Black Hills National Forest area of influence.

- The Custer County Comprehensive Plan (2009) lists a goal to “Promote a desirable rural atmosphere, character, and appearance in the county.” The Plan says that “in a 2007 survey more than 84% of the residents that responded overwhelmingly selected the “Rural Lifestyle” as the most important reason that they choose to live in Custer County.”
- The Lawrence County Comprehensive Plan (2020) shares that “residents and stakeholders emphasized the special sense of place in Lawrence County, characterized by its rich history, unique incorporated and rural communities, and the surrounding natural environment and opportunities for outdoor recreation.” It also noted that “being stewards of the land and caring for the environment are important values to Lawrence County residents.”
- The Meade County Comprehensive Plan (2010) shows a goal “To maintain a viable agricultural economy and preserve the rural quality of life.”
- The Pennington County Comprehensive Plan (2020) identifies the vision statement as “We pride ourselves on protecting the natural, cultural, and historic resources that help define our social identity and values. The County continues to grow in a manner that maintains water and air quality, improves career and housing opportunities, and retains our excellent schools and quality of life.”

The forest plan generally directs that floodplain and wetland values on the lands going out of and coming into federal ownership in land exchanges should be equal or in favor of the United States. Additionally, general direction for classifying lands for acquisition or disposal purposes are as follows:

Acquisition

- Land in designated wilderness and other congressionally classified areas,
- Where lands or rights-of-way are needed to meet resource management objectives,
- Land which provides habitat for threatened and endangered species,
- Land which includes floodplains or wetlands, and,

- Lands having historical or cultural resources, outstanding scenic values, or critical ecosystems, when these resources are threatened by change of use or when management may be enhanced by public ownership.

Disposal

- To states, counties, cities, or other federal agencies when disposal will serve a greater public interest,
- In small parcels intermingled with mineral or homestead patents,
- When suitable for development by the private sector (residential, agriculture, industrial, recreational, etc.) is in the public interest, and,
- When critical or unique resource effects are mitigated by reserving interest to protect the resource, or by exchange where other critical resources to be acquired are of equal or greater value.

Management goals in the current forest plan state that exchange and transfer of land should be increased, and rights-of-way needed to support management of National Forest resources should be acquired. Additionally, general direction provides that rights-of way should be acquired on existing Forest System roads and trails that cross private lands. While all this direction is being implemented to some extent, these are time-intensive and specialized activities that require significant investment in staff time and training. Budget constraints and staffing levels have a significant impact on the Black Hills NF's ability to implement this direction.

Non-Recreation Special Use Management

Special use authorizations are generally allowed if they are complementary and compatible with the development level and other management objectives defined in the land management designations of the area where they are located. General direction also provides that special uses should not be approved that can be reasonably met on private or other non-federal lands unless they are clearly in the public interest, and that special uses should not be approved adjacent to recreation sites unless such use is compatible. This direction is generally being implemented.

Issues in the Broader Landscape

Regional population and visitation levels are increasing dramatically and are not expected to slow down. A 2020 National Migration Study ranked South Dakota as the fourth most popular location nationwide to relocate (Manus 2021). According to the Rapid City Journal, real estate sale numbers are up by approximately 50% and new builds are up about 500%. Shifts in tourism and visitor use have been steadily increasing, with a 1.7 million increase in visitation levels to South Dakota from 2013 to 2019, a 13% increase. In 2018, the Black Hills NF region captured approximately 40% of the income from visitor sales (Tourism Economics 2020). While invigorating for the local economy, this also puts pressure on the ability of Black Hills NF to manage and best meet the needs of the forest and adjacent communities in light of limited resources as increased use results in increased maintenance costs.

The trend for use and occupancy of National Forest System land is on an upward trend and will most likely continue as demand for the forest to respond to requests for infrastructure upgrades increase in tandem with the increase in population. Local resident desire for a rural lifestyle as identified in county comprehensive plans will need to be balanced with population growth and associated infrastructure need.

Chapter 5. Need For Change

Comments from public review will help inform the need to and update forest plan direction. Identifying needs for change to the current plan is an iterative process and this draft assessment report may identify preliminary needs to change, which may be further refined during subject matter expert, cooperating agency, and public review of these documents.

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Appendix A. Map

The following map is provided as a separate PDF document on the forest plan revision [assessment webpage](#) for the Black Hills National Forest.

Map 1. Black Hills NF Land Ownership