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Northern Region/Lolo National Forest

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Draft Preliminary Need to Change Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan



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Draft Preliminary Need to Change

Lolo National Forest Land Management Plan

Mineral, Missoula, Sanders, Granite, Powell, Lewis and Clark, and Flathead counties

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Cover photo: A hiker stands in front of a lookout with mountains in background. Photo credit: USDA Forest Service.

Abstract: This document identifies the preliminary needs to change management direction in the 1986 Lolo Forest Plan. It will help define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the environmental analysis related to the forest plan revision process. The need to change establishes the framework for development of plan components and other plan content, including the monitoring program. Not all changes must be identified now. With the 2012 Planning Rule and an adaptive approach, other changes can be identified as the planning process continues. The needs identified here will undergo analysis and do not represent a final conclusion. All management direction will be examined and modified as necessary to ensure compliance with the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule. For further information, see the Lolo National Forest Revision Web Hub at:

<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/lolo/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd993646> or contact the plan revision team leader, Amanda Milburn, at (406) 438-6640.

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1. Introduction

A land management plan (commonly referred to as a forest plan) is the overarching direction for management decisions and projects on the Lolo National Forest, constrained by law, regulation, and policy. The current forest plan was adopted in 1986. The current plan is posted at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/lolo/landmanagement/planning>.

Over the last thirty-five years, the environmental and political landscapes of the Lolo National Forest have changed in ways that were not foreseen or addressed in the 1986 planning effort. These broad changes, which impact the context of forest planning, include legal framework and policy, science, social conditions, values, ecosystem conditions, drivers, and stressors such as climate change. In addition, the Lolo National Forest has acquired over 200,000 acres of land since 1986.

The Lolo National Forest initiated plan revision under the 2012 Planning Rule on March 16, 2023, with a notice of intent to prepare an assessment. This “need to change” document identifies the need to change certain management direction in the 1986 forest plan. It helps define the proposed action, purpose and need, and decision framework for the subsequent environmental analysis. The need to change establishes the framework for the development of plan components and other plan content, including the monitoring program. In addition to the preliminary needs identified in this document, it is expected that other need to change items will be identified as the planning process continues. Not all changes must be identified now. The needs identified here will undergo analysis and do not represent a final conclusion. With the 2012 Planning Rule and an adaptive approach, other changes can be identified as needed. All management direction will be examined and modified as necessary to ensure its compliance with the requirements of the 2012 Planning Rule.

The Lolo National Forest prepared a forest-wide assessment of the condition of fifteen ecological, social, and economic topics. The Draft Assessment was released for a 30-day comment period from June 9, 2023, to July 8, 2023; and the Revised Assessment is found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/lolo/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105223>. The assessment provides a basis of information for changing the 1986 plan. The planning team reviewed information in the assessment when preparing this Draft Preliminary Need to Change. The Assessment shows that the 1986 plan is functional in providing broad-based direction for management, but is dated in terms of strategic integrative planning, reflecting new science, reflecting new laws and regulations, and addressing emerging topics and resource conditions.

The Draft Preliminary Need to Change is organized by four broad themes, listed below. The need to change is represented by the first three themes. Each theme is described in more detail, with examples for illustration; however, plan changes are not limited to the examples. Taken together, the changes related to these themes will result in substantial changes to the 1986 plan. Nevertheless, plan revision is not a “zero based” planning effort. Many aspects of the 1986 Forest Plan provide valuable and appropriate management direction. Therefore, a fourth section describing what *does not* need to change is also included.

- Comply with the 2012 planning rule and associated directives.
- Reflect new laws, policy, regulation, and direction adopted since 1986.

- Address gaps in current plan direction.
- Identify what is not changing.

This Draft Preliminary Need to Change is provided to the public as an informational tool as we transition from the assessment phase into plan development. From September 2023 to January 2024, we will use this draft document as a foundation for conversations as we build the proposed action. We will use these efforts to refine the preliminary need to change, which will be published with the proposed action to initiate the scoping process. Public comment on the proposed action and the preliminary need to change will be used to refine the purpose and need and build alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement.

1.1 Public and Tribal Involvement

The Responsible Official must involve the public in the development of the need to change the plan by giving the public the opportunity to comment on a draft preliminary need to change before documenting the need to change the plan as part of the purpose and need in the environmental analysis documents for the plan development, plan revision, or plan amendment.

Building off the extensive public engagement that occurred during the assessment phase, as described in the Revised Assessment, public outreach will continue as we develop the proposed action and refine this preliminary need to change document. General public engagement opportunities occurring during the plan development stage include webinars, online workshops, in-person workshops, informal online Revision Team “office hours”, and in-person ranger chats. In addition, we continue to host quarterly meetings with an Interagency Governmental Working Group, and to work closely with our cooperating agencies, including monthly interdisciplinary meetings. Thus far, cooperating agencies for the plan revision include Mineral County; Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation; Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks; and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes (CSKT).

In addition, the Forest Service is conducting consultation activities with all tribes interested in the revision process, including the CSKT, Nez Perce, Blackfeet, Coeur d’Alene, and Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. General tribal membership outreach is also occurring, including meeting in person with the CSKT Tribal Elder’s Council and conducting tribal youth outreach.

1.2 Previous Plan Revision under the 2005 Planning Rule

A previous plan-revision effort was initiated on the Western Montana Planning Zone (Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo National Forests) in 2003 using the 1982 Planning Rule. This effort transitioned to the 2005 Planning Rule in May of 2005. This process included an analysis of the management situation, which described the need for change from the 1986 plan. This planning effort produced a draft plan and proposed action in 2006 which received public comment. However, shortly after the 2005 planning rule was withdrawn, and the planning effort was not completed. This previous effort provides some insight and context into the need for change. Six major need for change themes were identified in the analysis of the management situation (2003):

- Access
- Integrated ecosystem management
- Forest products
- Recreation and outfitter guide management

- Wilderness recommendations and roadless areas
- Wildland-urban interface management

Issues raised during public comment on the 2006 proposed action also provide a foundation for identifying the current need to change, as does the outcomes of the Tribal consultation that occurred from 2003 to 2006 with the CSKT, Nez Perce, Coeur d' Alene, and Shoshone-Bannock tribes. Relevant information from need for change, public comment and issues, and tribal input identified as part of the 2003-2006 planning effort is incorporated throughout this document.

1.3 2021 Biennial Monitoring and Evaluation Report

Monitoring and evaluation requirements have been established through the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) at 36 CFR 219. Additional direction is provided by the Forest Service in Chapter 30 – Monitoring – of the Land Management Handbook (FSH 1909.12). The Lolo Forest Plan Monitoring Program was updated in 2016 for consistency with the 2012 planning regulations. The 1986 Lolo Forest Plan was administratively changed to include the updated plan monitoring program. Based on the updated monitoring program, a biennial monitoring evaluation report was prepared in 2021. The biennial monitoring evaluation report considers information related to plan components to evaluate if recommended changes are needed in plan direction, such as plan components or other plan content, that guide management of resources in plan area. The full 2021 Biennial Monitoring Report for the Lolo National Forest is available at the following weblink: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/lolo/landmanagement/planning>.

The Biennial Monitoring Report is not a decision document. However, it does include recommendations for adaptive management based on monitoring results. Because the results of monitoring are based on implementation of the 1986 forest plan, some of these recommendations directly inform a need to change in the 1986 plan direction. The relevant recommendations from the Biennial Report are incorporated into this need to change document.

2. 2012 Planning Rule Requirements

The 1986 forest plan was developed under planning regulations developed in 1982. The Forest Service and the public has learned much about forest management and planning in the intervening 35 plus years. The agency updated its planning regulations in 2012, reflecting a shift toward more strategic planning. Revised plans focus on outcomes rather than outputs; integrate resource management; and contribute to ecological, economic, and social sustainability. An “all lands” approach places forest management in the context of the broader landscape. Revised plans are rooted in the distinctive roles and contributions of each national forest and emphasize an adaptive management approach using the best available scientific information. Many of the changes associated with the revision of the 1986 forest plan will result from the requirements of the 2012 Planning Regulations (36 CFR 219). For example, there are requirements for what must be in land management plans, including plan content, plan components, and other optional elements. Examples of these requirements are described below. Plan changes are not limited to the examples provided.

2.1 New Information and Science

A vast amount of new information and science has been developed since the 1986 Lolo National Forest Plan was adopted. The 2012 planning regulations require the responsible official to identify and consider the best available scientific information in plan revision (36 CFR 219.3). Best available scientific information must be accurate, reliable, and relevant and includes ecological, social, and economic scientific information. Sources of scientific information include peer reviewed articles, scientific assessments, other information such as expert opinion, panel consensus, inventories, or observational data, data prepared and managed by the Forest Service or other agencies, scientific information prepared by universities and other scientific organizations, and data or information from public and governmental participation (FSH 1909.12.07.13).

The responsible official is also required to request information about native knowledge, land ethics, cultural issues, and sacred and culturally significant sites (36 CFR 219.4(a)). Other policies, such as the Presidential Memo on Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (2021) underscore the importance of considering native knowledge and information in federal planning and decision making.

Examples of updates needed based on new and best available scientific information are integrated into the resource-specific sections of this document.

2.2 Required Plan Content

The revised plan must fulfill all requirements of the 2012 planning rule. The rule emphasizes ecological, social, and economic sustainability, as well as integrated resource management. There are also particular requirements for additional items such as timber and monitoring. Management direction must be achievable and within the fiscal capability of the Lolo National Forest. The planning requirements of the major requirement themes with general examples for the need to change are explored in this section.

2.2.1 Resource Integration and Strategic Planning

The structure and content of the 1986 Forest Plan is often more tactical than strategic; and output, rather than outcome, focused. In addition, the planning regulations emphasize the development of integrated plan content, and require the revised plan to—

- Provide ecological conditions to restore, establish, and maintain functioning ecosystems on National Forest System lands that can sustainably support multiple uses and provide a broad range of goods and services, considering the natural range of variation;
- Provide for ecological integrity, ecosystem services (benefits to people), and multiple uses in an integrated manner; and
- Develop plan components that are integrated across resources.

Examples of the need to change from the 1986 Forest Plan to address strategic planning and resource-integration requirements include:

- There is a need for management direction that recognizes interconnectedness of actions and to incorporate resource management principles that address potential resources conflicts as well as complementary resource interactions.
- There is a need to shift from output-based to outcome-based planning, such as using desired conditions and objectives and placing less emphasis on prescriptive standards.
- There is a need to update tactical, prescriptive language with strategic language; that is, identifying land use suitability, defining desired conditions, and identifying quantifiable objectives and project design guidelines and standards to achieve those desired conditions.
- There is a need to reconsider the management area scheme used in the 1986 Forest Plan. The large number, arrangement, and small sizes of the existing management areas in the current plans are challenging to apply to project-level activities.
- There is a need to ensure that integrated plan content supports and protects important tribal areas and resources as they relate to reserved treaty rights.

2.2.2 Ecological Sustainability

The 2012 Planning Rule emphasizes the need to maintain and restore ecological integrity. Requirements include:

- Restore, establish, and maintain functioning ecosystems that will have greater adaptive capacity to withstand stressors and recover from disturbances, especially changing and uncertain environmental conditions and extreme weather events.
- Maintain ecological sustainability and connectivity to provide diversity of plant and animal habitat communities and support the persistence of native species.
- Provide ecological conditions that contribute to the recovery of threatened and endangered species that occur on the Forest.
- Identify aquatic, wildlife, invertebrate, and plant species of conservation concern and include plan components to maintain or restore ecological conditions on the Forest to contribute to maintaining a viable population of the species within its range.
- Address new stressors including the potential influences of climate change.

- Integrate wildland fire, fuels management, and the restoration of fire-adapted ecosystems.
- Maintain or restore air quality, soils and soil productivity, water quality, and water resources, including lakes, streams, and wetlands; groundwater; public water supplies; sole-source aquifers; source water protection areas; and other sources of drinking water.
- Provide widths for riparian management zones around lakes, intermittent and perennial streams, and open-water wetlands, giving special attention to land and vegetation about 100 feet from the edge of all perennial streams and lakes.
- Identify priority watersheds to focus efforts for maintenance or restoration using the National Watershed Condition Framework.

Examples of the need to change from the 1986 Forest Plan to address ecological sustainability requirements include:

- There is a need to develop plan direction that emphasizes ecological restoration and management to promote resilient ecosystems with capacity to recover from stressors such as insects, disease, and wildfire. This direction should consider the natural range of variation as well as climate change, expected disturbances, and socioeconomic factors.
- There is a need to consider climate change impacts, mitigation, and adaptation strategies.
- There is a need to develop integrated plan content that reflects complementary ecosystem and species-level approaches to provide habitats for all native species.
- There is a need to develop plan content that provides for the ecological conditions needed to maintain a viable population of species of conservation concern within the plan area.
- There is a need to develop plan content that provides for the ecological conditions necessary to contribute to the recovery of current federally listed threatened and endangered species and conserve proposed and candidate species.
- There is a need for plan direction addressing the introduction and spread of non-native, invasive plant species, including direction that would minimize the spread of non-native plants that may increase as a result of management activities.
- There is a need to provide desired conditions and other plan direction that is tailored to each ecosystem type to reflect natural disturbance regimes, system dynamics, and stressors.
- There is a need to develop integrated plan content that provides for resilient aquatic and riparian ecosystems.

2.2.3 Social and Economic Sustainability and Multiple Uses

The 2012 planning rule emphasizes the contribution to social and economic sustainability to provide people and communities with a range of social, cultural, and economic benefits. Plans will guide management of National Forest System lands so that they have the capacity to provide people and communities with ecosystem services and multiple uses that provide a range of social, economic, and ecological benefits for the present and into the future (36 CFR 219.1(c)). Under this theme, the planning regulations require the revised plan to—

- Provide for ecosystem services and multiple use, including outdoor recreation, range, timber, fish, wildlife, plants, and water resources;
- Manage areas of tribal importance and protect cultural and historic resources;

- Guide the development of mineral, nonrenewable, and renewable energy resources within the appropriate legal authorities of the Forest Service;
- Address sustainable recreation, including integration of recreation settings, opportunities, and access;
- Consider trails and appropriate placement and sustainable management of infrastructure, such as recreational facilities and transportation and utility corridors;
- Provide a social, economic and ecological sustainable infrastructure that can be managed in accordance with other plan components;
- Provide for scenic character;
- Identify existing designated areas, determine whether to recommend additional areas, and include plan components for appropriate management of these areas;
- Conduct a process to identify potential recommended wilderness areas that may be included in the revised plan;
- Conduct a wild and scenic rivers eligibility study for all free-flowing, named streams on the Lolo National Forest;
- Support opportunities to coordinate with neighboring landowners and land managers to link open spaces and consider joint management objectives where feasible and appropriate; and
- Consider land status and ownership, use, and access patterns relevant to the Lolo National Forest.

Examples of the need to change the 1986 Forest Plans for social and economic sustainability and multiple uses include:

- There is a need for plan direction reflecting the Forest's role in supporting local economies through commodity production (including timber and permitted grazing), other multiple-uses, and the service-based economy that includes recreation and tourism.
- There is a need to provide plan direction for the protection of treaty reserved resources, cultural uses, and the sustainable management of habitats for plant and animal species important to tribes and other traditional communities.
- There is a need for plan direction for management and accommodation of the removal of miscellaneous products for commercial, noncommercial, and tribal use, such as plants (used for food, fuel, medicine, or crafts), tipi poles, or other materials.
- There is a need to update plan direction reflecting the Forest's role in meeting a range of public recreation demands considering social, environmental, fiscal, and regional context.
- There is a need to incorporate wilderness plan direction to support the preservation of wilderness characteristics, as well as to provide guidance on other roadless areas.
- There is a need to incorporate direction for management of designated national recreation, scenic, and historic trails.
- There is a need to establish desired recreation opportunity spectrum settings that reflect changing use patterns, and to apply the scenery management system to identify scenic integrity objectives that are integrated with other resource needs.

- Unified minerals and energy management guidance is needed, within Forest Service authority, for locatable and leasable minerals, personal use collection of mineral materials, renewable energy resources and related transmission corridors, and for Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act sites.
- There is a need to update plan direction to address multiple demands for the existing and projected water supply in a sustainable manner.

2.2.4 Timber Harvest

The 2012 planning rule has detailed guidance for timber harvest and recognizes timber harvest occurs for many different reasons other than timber production. The rule requires the new plan to—

- Identify lands that are suited and not suited for timber production;
- Develop plan components to guide harvest on lands suited for timber production;
- Establish permissible reasons and plan components to guide the use of timber harvest as a tool to protect other multiple use values on lands not suited for timber production;
- Calculate (1) the sustained yield limit (the amount of timber that can be harvested from the forest annually in perpetuity on a sustained-yield basis); (2) the projected timber sale quantity (the estimated quantity of timber expected to be sold during the plan period); and (3) the projected wood sale quantity (the estimated quantity of timber and all other wood products expected to be sold from the plan area for the plan period); and
- Consider the opportunity to establish exceptions to a 40-acre limits on maximum size of created openings, based on the natural range of variation.

Examples of the need to change from the 1986 forest plan to meet the requirements for timber harvest include:

- There is a need to identify lands suitable for timber production and harvest based on updated regulations as well as current vegetation conditions, trends, and best available information regarding reforestation issues, climate change, sensitive soils, and landforms.
- There is a need for plan direction that guides the use of timber harvest on lands unsuitable for timber production to achieve other multiple-use values.
- There is a need to develop maximum opening size limits for harvest that reflect an understanding of natural patch sizes informed by the natural range of variation and an enhanced understanding of dynamic landscape patterns and processes.

2.2.5 Monitoring

The 2012 planning rule requires a sustainable plan monitoring program that identifies monitoring questions, indicators, and measures to evaluate whether plan components are effective and whether management is maintaining or achieving progress towards desired conditions and objectives. Requirements for monitoring include:

- The revised plan needs to contain one or more monitoring questions and associated indicators, based on the best available science.

- The monitoring plan must identify potential plant and/or animal focal species or other monitoring measures to indicate the health of ecosystems and their components (coarse filter) or specific habitats (fine filter) as needed.
- Focal species replace management indicator species from the 1982 planning regulations.

Examples of the need to change from the 1986 Forest Plan to meet monitoring requirements include:

- There is a need to develop an updated, cost-effective, adaptable monitoring strategy that reflects current techniques, ecological principles, and available data.
- There is a need to ensure that monitoring is strategic, straightforward, and implementable.

2.3 Required Plan Components

Plan components are the specific elements of the land management plan. The required plan content described above is carried out through the plan components. Plan components must be within Forest Service authority, and both the inherent and fiscal capability of the Forest. Required plan components include:

- Desired conditions describe the vision of what the Forest should look like in terms of social, economic, and/or ecological characteristics of the plan area, or a portion of the plan area, toward which management of the land and resources should be directed. Desired conditions must be described in terms that are specific enough to allow progress toward their achievement to be determined but do not include completion dates. Desired conditions are not commitments or decisions for projects and activities. For some resources, the desired condition may currently exist. For others, they may only be achievable over a long period. Desired conditions drive the development of other plan components.
- Objectives are concise, measurable, and time-specific statement of a desired rate of progress toward a desired condition or conditions. Objectives describe the focus of management within the plan period, considered to be over the first 15 years of plan implementation, unless otherwise specified. Objectives should be based on reasonably foreseeable budgets.
- Standards are mandatory constraints on project and activity decision-making, established to help achieve or maintain the desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet legal requirements.
- Guidelines are constraints on project and activity decision-making that allows departure from its terms, so long as the purpose of the guideline is met. Guidelines are established to help achieve or maintain a desired condition or conditions, to avoid or mitigate undesirable effects, or to meet legal requirements.
- Suitability of lands for various uses or activities must be identified based on applicable desired conditions. The plan will also identify lands as not suitable for uses that are not compatible with desired conditions. Suitability need not be identified for every use or activity; however, the plan must identify lands that are not suitable for timber production.
- The plan must also identify where plan components apply. Every plan must have management areas, geographic areas, or both. Plans use management areas or geographic areas to apply plan components to specific mapped parcels of land. Geographic areas are based on place; management areas are based on purpose. In addition, plan components may

apply to land of specific character; for example, lands suitable for timber production, mapped recreation opportunity spectrum settings, mapped scenic integrity objectives, or certain ecosystem or habitat conditions.

Additional required plan content includes:

- Identification of priority watersheds and a conservation watershed network.
- Identification of the distinctive roles and contributions of the plan area.
- Development of a plan monitoring program.
- Description of proposed and possible actions.

In many cases, the components found in the 1986 Forest Plan do not meet the definitions and requirements of the 2012 rule. Therefore, there is a need to develop an array of plan components that meet both the required content and plan component definitions. For example:

- There is a need to incorporate an array of plan components that guide project development and analysis, providing the appropriate balance of specificity and adaptability.
- There is a need to ensure that plan components are integrated, clearly written, and implementable and clarify the purpose and need for management activities.
- There is a need to identify a more streamlined array of management areas that provide clear guidance on suitable uses and objectives.

2.4 Optional Plan Components and Content

In addition to the required elements, the revised plan may include optional content. For example, goals are optional content that consist of broad statements of intent usually related to process or interaction with the public expressed in broad, general terms without completion dates. Other optional content includes potential management approaches or strategies, priorities and management emphasis, partnership opportunities, existing conditions, explanatory narrative, general management principles, management challenges, performance history and risks, or referenced material. Optional content must not include, or appear to include, a “to do” list of tasks or actions and can be changed through administrative changes. There is a need to identify if there are optional plan components and content needed in the revised plan to guide future management.

3. Reflect New Law, Policy, Regulation, and Direction

Multiple laws, executive orders, and Forest Service direction have been implemented or changed since 1986. The Lolo National Forest has adjusted management practices as needed to comply with laws and regulations, but over time the alignment with the 1986 Forest Plan has become increasingly cumbersome to address in project planning and analysis. There are over forty plan amendments to the 1986 plan, many of which are designed to support the changing legal and regulatory framework. Although the revised plan should not repeat law, regulation, or policy, it can be developed to more clearly and consistently align with the current regulatory framework. The revised plan will strive to remove components that are redundant with policy, direction, and programmatic planning documents. Incorporating this direction by reference will make the plan more adaptable to changing laws and policies. Some examples of new requirements include:

- Ensure that the plan appropriately supports the implementation of the agency and regional climate action plans, in support of executive orders and other emerging regulations and policy related to climate change.
- Provide a framework that supports the Lolo National Forest's contributions to implementing the Wildfire Crisis Strategy.
- Update direction for management of unauthorized human-caused fire in accordance with the latest federal wildland fire management policy.
- Update plan direction for unplanned and planned fire in designated wilderness areas in accordance with fire and fuel management guidelines outlined in Forest Service Manual 2324, and to be consistent with new wildland fire policies, strategies, and regulations.
- Ensure that the plan supports new departmental policies and regulations focused on social equity and justice.
- Align the plan with new regulations and laws related to the management of tribal relations and cultural resources, including the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990 and Title VIII, Subtitle B of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008.
- Develop plan direction address the management and protection of traditional cultural properties, historic landscapes, and historic sites and districts per the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended in 1992.
- Develop plan direction to address management, use, and protection of sacred sites and lands per the 1996 Executive Order 13007, Indian Sacred Sites.
- Ensure the plan supports implementing the emerging policy on mature and old growth forest, per Executive Order 14072, as appropriate.
- Address the change in status for federally listed species over time (candidate, proposed, threatened, or endangered). Some species listed when the original plans were implemented have since been de-listed, while new species have been added.
- Ensure plan direction is consistent with the most current conservation strategies, such as those for grizzly bear, lynx, and bull trout.

- Align the plan with Forest Service Northern Region Soils Management Handbook requirements.
- Ensure the plan is consistent with and supports the requirements found in the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule.
- Ensure the plan is adaptive to changing conditions and regulations over time.

4. Address Gaps in Current Plan Direction

Certain resources or topics were not addressed in the 1986 plan, or do not meet the required plan content described above. There is a need to provide direction related to these topics in the revised plan. This section outlines more detailed or Forest-specific need to change items that are in addition to the required plan content and components described above.

4.1 Resource Integration

There is a need for integrated plan content that incorporates both ecological principles and socioeconomic perspectives. The need for integrated content includes, but is not limited to:

- Integrated plan content that recognizes and responds to the current and expected impacts of climate change.
- Plan direction for the wildlife and recreation interface in densely populated and visited areas to accommodate recreation demand and public safety while maintaining habitat conditions to sustain wildlife populations.
- Plan direction for restoration needs on recently acquired lands that addresses an array of issues such as invasive plants, legacy road systems, and past silvicultural practices.
- Plan direction that addresses air quality and fire and fuels management, vegetation, and aquatic resources to reconcile potential conflicts between the use of fire as a management tool and other resource constraints.
- Plan direction that addresses vegetation treatments for multiple objectives, such as, but not limited to, timber and wildfire risk mitigation objectives.

4.2 Ecological Sustainability

There is a need to—

- Manage for sustainable ecosystems and to allow adaptive responses to changing resource conditions, law, policy, and regulation.
- Incorporate multiple sources of natural disturbances such as flood, fire, and ecosystem engineers into management strategies.

4.2.1 Aquatic and Riparian Ecosystems

There is a need—

- To provide for the protection, maintenance, and restoration of riparian and wetland vegetation and channel morphology;

- To provide direction on the sustainable management of groundwater, springs, wetlands, riparian areas, intermittent and perennial waters, and adjacent upland areas and their interconnections;
- To establish management direction for aquatic and riparian ecosystems that meets the intent of INFISH and PACFISH and contributes to improvement of aquatic habitat and eventual delisting of fish species under the Endangered Species Act;
- To update management direction and monitoring that addresses aquatic species and habitat needs, aquatic connectivity, fish passage and stream crossings, and aquatic invasive species;
- To support resilient watersheds to provide watershed health and function, considering factors such as natural disturbances;
- To provide integrated direction guiding the active restoration of watersheds to maintain and improve water quality and riparian conditions and contributes to the removal of waters from the state 303(d) list;
- For water quality management, especially within wilderness areas. There is a need for guidance on water rights, easement, diversion, and in-stream flow issues;
- To include integrated plan direction that addresses valley bottoms, specifically to support conditions consistent with the natural range of variation, include the role of beavers, and supports restoration activities;
- For plan direction that recognizes the role keystone species, such as beavers, and the associated ecological communities that are dependent upon their presence; and
- To better manage the effects of roads on soil, water, and fisheries.

4.2.2 Terrestrial Ecosystems

There is a need—

- To develop desired conditions that support ecosystem resilience considering the role of disturbances such as fire, insects, and disease;
- To provide plan direction for soil productivity and soil quality that maintains ecosystem functions (including carbon sequestration and nutrient cycling). This plan content should be clear, effective, ecologically based, and independent of management action; and soil monitoring should better capture known issues and conditions such as landslide-prone areas and alluvial fans;
- To provide direction for the management of non-forest vegetation types (such as grasslands and shrublands);
- To provide a sustainable conservation and management strategy for old growth and other late-successional forests which incorporate considerations such as wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and forest and landscape resilience to disturbances;
- For updated snag and downed wood plan components that integrate wildlife habitat needs, soil productivity, and other ecosystem functions. Consistent guidance needs to reflect the natural variation and capabilities of ecosystem types in the context of natural disturbances as well as public health, safety, and multiple use considerations;

- To include plan content that supports the restoration of species or ecosystems that are outside the natural range of variation in terms of abundance, distribution, or structural condition; and those that are particularly vulnerable to threats and stressors;
- For plan direction that provides comprehensive guidance for prescribed fire, unplanned ignitions, and management of wildfire that incorporates fire as a natural disturbance and tool for achieving desired conditions while also recognizing socioeconomic factors, values at risk, the variation in natural fire regimes across different ecosystems, and the departure from natural fire regimes;
- To provide plan components that support a coordinated strategy to address noxious weed infestations, while considering the effects that invasive plants and altered fire regimes have on the biological diversity of rangelands;
- To provide management direction that addresses the importance of habitat connectivity, landscape patch and pattern, and wildlife-linkage zones between landscapes;
- To incorporate plan content that addresses vulnerabilities to climate change and potential climate adaptation strategies, such as assisted migration of plants and trees, to ensure that desired conditions can be met, and important ecosystem services can be provided in a changing climate;
- For plan content that defines and supports vegetation conditions necessary to achieve a range of outcomes, including the delivery of ecosystem services, recognizing the unique needs of specific areas such as the wildland-urban interface, developed recreation areas, and utility corridors; and
- To consider the concepts fire refugia and climate refugia and how the ecological role of these areas can be supported by the plan.

4.2.3 Native Plant and Wildlife Diversity

There is a need—

- To incorporate multi-species and/or habitat-based plan components;
- To develop plan guidance that will increase the resilience of whitebark pine ecosystems;
- For direction to recognize and prevent disease (for example, white-nose syndrome in bats and white pine blister rust);
- To update management direction for elk that reflects the latest understanding of habitat and security requirements and clarifies the responsibilities and perspectives of Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks;
- For programmatic direction on the management of amphibians;
- To update management direction that reflects updated information on bull trout status, threats, and trends;
- To address management issues and habitat requirements for several rare endemic species, including, but not limited to, the western pearlshell muscle and Idaho giant salamander;
- To support and coordinate threatened and endangered species programs and other at-risk species across agencies and administrative boundaries;

- For the plan to incorporate the latest grizzly bear management science and policy, and address the role that the Lolo National Forest plays in providing connectivity to the Bitterroot Ecosystem Expansion Area;
- To consider landscape-level issues in establishing wildlife management components, including the function and management direction of adjoining non-NFS lands;
- For plan content that supports the important role that pollinators play in the ecosystem and addresses their habitat requirements; and
- For plan content that reflects the road system impact on federally listed species.

4.3 Social and Economic Sustainability

There is a need for—

- Plan content that supports delivery of the array of ecosystem services provided by the Lolo National Forest, including inputs to local industry and economics.
- Plan content that supports the important role that outside partners, including cooperating agencies, play in land management planning and implementation.

4.3.1 Cultural and Historical Resources and Areas of Tribal Importance

There is a need—

- For more strategic direction on the management of heritage programs and resources;
- For the revised plan to acknowledge American Indian issues and Forest Service trust responsibilities and promote education on American Indian use of National Forest lands to exercise their treaty rights;
- To support the proper usage of key terms, such as correct tribal names, definition of traditional uses; and the relationship between reservation lands, ceded lands, and aboriginal territories, recognizing that different tribes may have used the same territories for different purposes at different historical times;
- To provide a comprehensive ecosystem-level approach to identifying and protecting traditional cultural properties and other sensitive sites;
- To consider previous planning issues raised by American Indian tribes, including, but not limited to, road and trail access to exercise treaty rights, designated areas for culturally significant forest products, use of traditional Indian place names, suitable uses in areas of tribal importance, and potential impacts on wildlife species of tribal interest; and
- To use modern culturally appropriate language to describe the roles, rights, and history of American Indians on what are now public lands managed by the Lolo National Forest.

4.3.2 Wildland-Urban Interface

There is a need—

- For plan content that reflects the likely trend in land development and expansion of the wildland-urban interface over time;

- To identify current and future uses that may affect the management and integrity of resources associated with wildland-urban interface lands, while recognizing the recreational uses and other ecosystem services that these areas provide;
- For the revised plan to address the extent of changes in fire regimes, the increased risks of severe fire behavior, and severe fire effects; and provide a context for fire management planning to identify values at risk, suppression costs, and promote ecosystem sustainability;
- To integrate the use of prescribed fire, fuel treatments, and wildland fire use objectives with visuals and other resources in the wildland-urban interface; and
- To clarify how the wildland interface is identified based on the latest law, regulation, policy, and best available scientific information; and for the plan to support appropriate fire management response across the landscape.

4.3.3 Sustainable Recreation and Scenery

There is a need—

- To develop strategic plan direction for outfitting and guiding that is based on current and forecasted public demand, protects resource values, and provides flexibility to accommodate changing public needs;
- For plan direction to guide the management of new and emerging technologies that may affect recreation opportunities and build flexibility into the plan so that new technologies, including, but not limited to, e-bikes and drones, can be addressed;
- For plan direction regarding the designation of non-motorized lakes;
- To incorporate the changes, impacts to natural resources, and future trends associated with expected increases in recreational uses, including, but not limited to, motorized accessibility for persons with limited mobility;
- For comprehensive management direction for motorized and nonmotorized travel to provide for increasing use and resource protection;
- To ensure that infrastructure accommodates developed camping and other associated activities;
- For plan direction guiding fuels and hazard tree management in and around recreation and administrative sites. Plan direction should provide for adaptive management strategies related to the treatment of vegetation at developed sites taking into account ecological processes, such as fire, insects, and diseases;
- For the plan to support adaptive management strategies for a sustainable trail system that balances available federal funding with infrastructure and the capacity to oversee partnerships and volunteers;
- To ensure that the plan provides management direction for high-use recreation areas, developed sites, and dispersed recreation;
- To provide more comprehensive management direction for recreation special uses, such as recreation events and recreation residences;

- To include designations and associated suitabilities for places on the landscape where certain recreation opportunities are emphasized, such as, but not limited to, the Blue Mountain and Pattee Creek Canyon areas;
- For the plan to reflect strategies for the management of recreation opportunities at a landscape level within a broader multijurisdictional context; and
- To update the management direction for the Rock Creek corridor that includes clear direction for concentrated use areas and core user groups.

4.3.4 Lands

There is a need—

- To provide comprehensive management direction for acquired lands, including ecosystem conditions, restoration, roads, infrastructure, recreational uses; and incorporating conditions on acquired lands into the plan monitoring program;
- For the revised plan to incorporate and ensure consistency with the latest utility corridor information;
- For programmatic guidance on hydropower development;
- To streamline the special-use permit authorization and renewal process given the trend in population and demand; and for better field monitoring to ensure permits are being obtained and that permit requirements are being followed;
- For updated programmatic direction on issuing and renewing special-use permits for ditches, diversions, electronic sites, utility corridors, and residences;
- For plan direction for utility rights-of-way and communication sites to help guide decisions about expanding permitted sites and authorizing new sites or corridors;
- For programmatic guidance on ski area management and expansion opportunities; and
- To update management guidance for potential new land acquisitions and exchanges to improve efficiency.

4.3.5 Infrastructure

There is a need—

- For the revised plan to provide guidance that supports a transportation system that provides reasonable access to National Forest lands for all users, minimizes environmental effects, incorporates different types of vehicles and purposes, and is within the fiscal capability of the unit;
- For the plan to clarify suitability for motorized, non-motorized, and mechanized uses to meet resource and social needs; and to provide clear direction regarding the suitability of lands for road construction activities;
- For programmatic guidance on partnership arrangements for managing Forest Service facilities;
- For plan direction to align with contemporary road design standards and emerging technology for logging equipment; and

- For the revised plan to provide programmatic support for the latest methods of conducting travel analysis, planning, and management.

4.3.6 Designated Areas

There is a need—

- To provide an appropriate framework to support updated wilderness management plan direction, and to clarify the decision space around wilderness dams;
- To update wild and scenic river eligibility determinations and provide programmatic wild and scenic river management;
- To update direction for management of research natural areas, special interest areas, and botanical areas; and to consider proposing additional areas;
- For plan content for recommended wilderness that reflects the influence of management activities conducted by American Indians prior to westward expansion; and
- To provide management guidance for recommended wilderness that addresses changing recreation uses, trends, and demand for recreation special uses.

4.3.7 Production of Natural Resources

Livestock grazing

There is a need—

- For plan direction for permitted livestock grazing that allows adaptive management toward ecosystem-based desired conditions, within site capability, and with particular emphasis on management in areas of concentrated use;
- For the plan to provide updated expectations and direction for anticipated animal-unit outputs on grazing allotments;
- For plan components that address livestock use in riparian ecosystems;
- For updated grazing suitability determinations and guidance for the management of vacant allotments; and
- To include plan components designed to minimize intermingling and conflicts between domestic and wild animals.

Timber harvest and Other Forest Products

There is a need—

- To determine reliable expected harvest levels, types, and volume outputs that consider—
 - Social conditions;
 - New policies and regulations (including, but not limited to, inventoried roadless areas, changes to federally listed species, and associated conservation strategies);
 - Reserved use rights of sovereign tribal nations and indigenous traditional ecological knowledge with respect to vegetation management;
 - Past and expected future management practices on adjacent private lands;

- Climate change, expected vegetation conditions, and expected disturbances;
- Contemporary prescriptions to achieve integrated desired conditions; and
- Current and expected capacity of mill infrastructure.
- For plan direction that is adaptive and responsive to new and emerging technologies, equipment, and harvest systems.
- For programmatic guidance on management of non-traditional and/or non-timber forest products.
- For updated plan direction regarding fuelwood gathering in the Seeley Lake Game Preserve.

Energy, Minerals, and Geology

There is a need—

- To update plan direction on the management of resources within jurisdiction of hard-rock mining laws;
- For plan components that guide minerals management to be better integrated with other resource areas, such as aquatic ecosystems;
- For mineral plan direction to be adaptive to changing interests, demands, and regulations; and
- For programmatic guidance on designation and protection of areas of special geologic interest, such as caves and geologic hazards.

Municipal watersheds and source water protection areas

There is a need—

- There is a need to develop more specific management direction for present and future municipal water supplies.
- For the revised plan to reflect a more consistent framework for identification and classification of source-water protection areas and municipal watersheds and augment existing management direction for these areas.

4.4 Monitoring

There is a need—

- For more emphasis and better data for the monitoring of soils, water, riparian areas, fisheries, and invasive species;
- To monitor the effects of prescribed and wildland fire on other resources; and
- To incorporate climate change vulnerability assessments into monitoring.

5. What is Not Changing

Some things will not be addressed in the revised plan because they are either outside the scope of plan revision, or the current management direction is working well. Examples of topics and components that are not expected to change in the revised plan include:

- The revised plan cannot change the boundaries or purposes of areas designated by Congress or areas subject to rule making. For example, existing wilderness boundaries were established and defined by Congress and cannot be modified in plan revision.
- The revised plan will not make site-specific decisions for land management activities.
- The plan will not include site-specific travel decisions, such as selection of roads, trails, and areas where motorized or mechanized vehicle travel will be allowed, restricted, or prohibited. Depending on the direction it sets, the revised plan may set context for future travel planning efforts.
- National scenic trails and national heritage roads designations cannot be modified in plan revision.
- The 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) establishes prohibitions and permissions on road construction, road reconstruction, and timber harvesting on 58.5 million acres of National Forest System lands. The Roadless Rule can only be modified through a subsequent rulemaking process by the U.S. Department of Agriculture or by legislation from Congress.
- The areas to which grizzly bear plan direction apply will not change, even though the nomenclature may change relative to the species' federal status. The term "recovery zone" applies to the area emphasized while the grizzly bear is listed under the Endangered Species Act. The term will change to "primary conservation area" if the grizzly bear is removed from the list of threatened species (that is, de-listed).
- Areas withdrawn from mineral entry under the General Mining Act as amended in the 1986 Forest Plan include designated wilderness areas and administrative and recreation sites with an investment in facilities. The Lolo National Forest will not undertake a determination of future withdrawal continuation, withdrawal modification, or withdrawal revocation during plan revision.
- The plan-revision effort will not undertake new oil and gas leasing decisions. Oil and gas leasing decisions require a detailed level of analysis that is difficult to combine with the programmatic level analysis conducted for a land management plan.
- Four suspended oil and gas leases cover about 8,396 acres. Due to a court decision, no activity may take place on the leases until an environmental impact statement is completed. The plan-revision effort will not undertake analysis related to these leases; such decisions require a detailed level of analysis that is difficult to combine with the programmatic level analysis conducted for a forest plan.
- Changing the current configuration of the Lolo National Forest is beyond the scope of forest plan revision; for instance, which ranger districts are part of the Forest.

- Some plan components are working well, and the revised plan should retain their intent, although the wording may be updated to reflect 2012 rule requirements. Examples of these components include—
 - Representing areas of concentrated public in the management area framework;
 - Providing dispersed recreation and special uses components;
 - Maintaining the general intent of the minerals plan direction;
 - Supporting many management options for multiple uses.
 - Aligning with INFISH management principles; and
 - Supporting optimization of the road network, including actions such as decommissioning and road construction.

6. Next Steps

The need to change elements described in this document, along with the Assessment, will be used as a foundation in the plan-revision process for the Lolo National Forest. The purpose of compiling this need to change is to focus the development of a draft proposed plan in conjunction with public and tribal involvement. This document will be revised throughout the plan development process, and ultimately published with the proposed action. Information on the planning process and additional public engagement opportunities can be found at the Lolo Web Hub: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/lolo/planrevision>.