

Lolo Plan Revision Proposed Action: Context for Topics Under Development



Figure 1. Eagle Cliff, Photo courtesy USDA Forest Service

The proposed action is a key milestone in the Lolo National Forest (LNF) plan revision process. Development of the proposed action was guided by a laws, regulations, policies, initiatives, and strategies; the ongoing identification of best available scientific information (BASI) and analysis; and ongoing work with partners and the public. This document provides information on topics that are in development based on:

- Emerging Law, Regulation, and Policy
- Emerging Science and Analysis
- Ongoing work with the Public

The Forest anticipates additional refinement on these topics as the revision process progresses in concert with public input.

Emerging Law, Regulation, & Policy

The proposed action was developed in accordance the 2012 Planning Rule and its supporting directives. It also aligns with applicable laws, regulations, and policies as well as broader scale Forest Service initiatives and strategies. There is uncertainty with respect to some national and

regional efforts that will unfold during the plan revision process. The LNF is monitoring these efforts, and the revision process will adjust to outcomes when appropriate. Examples include:

- National policy making in response to Secretarial Memos and Executive Orders.
- Potential changes with respect to species listed as Threatened, Endangered, Candidate, or Proposed under the Endangered Species Act. This may include species status changes and new or updated conservation strategies.
- Potential legislation. The LNF cannot speculate or take action based on ongoing legislation.
- Updates to land management plans of neighboring Forests, other agencies, and governments.

Emerging science and analysis

The team is working with new science and research, and working with partners to conduct analysis on several key topics, including:

Connectivity

Proposed Action Content

- The connectivity section of the proposed action is in Chapter 2, section 2.1.1.
- Other sections include components that tie to connectivity, including forested vegetation, old growth, watershed, species diversity, lands, and infrastructure.
- Possible management approaches are included in Appendix 3.

Status of Work on this Topic

The connectivity of ecosystems is one of the Lolo's distinctive roles and contributions in the broader landscape. Connectivity is an element of focus in Secretary's Memorandum 1077-004 (2022) and is also of high interest to the public and partners. In addition to seeking alignment with policy, the planning team is conducting modeling and analysis with partners to complement an ever-growing body of science and research on this topic. The outcomes of this work are not yet available. For example, additional work is anticipated with respect to how the revised plan may spatially address connectivity and wildlife linkage areas. This topic and the supporting analysis may also lend itself to specific science-based discussions and public engagements. See also the [Connectivity](#) FAQ on the Web Hub.

Old Growth

Proposed Action Content

- A section on old growth is found in Chapter 2 of the proposed action, section 2.1.1.
- There is no map of old growth; it is expected to be dynamic over time.
- Other components that relate to old growth are found in the forested vegetation and at-risk wildlife sections.
- Possible management approaches are found in Appendix 3.

Overview and Status of this Topic

Old growth is a topic of public interest and emerging policymaking. Executive Order 14072: Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies (2022) acknowledges the importance of mature and old growth forests. In response to the requirements in the executive order, in December 2023 the USDA released a Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement with a proposal to amend forest land management plans to conserve and steward old-growth forest conditions on all national forests. The proposed action includes the plan components provided in this NOI. Other elements of the

agency's response to the executive order, including a nationwide inventory and risk assessment, also provide information that may be relevant to old growth analysis. The LNF revision will remain consistent with this nation-wide work as it evolves.

Species Diversity and At-risk species

Proposed Action Content

- The Species Diversity section (Chapter 2, section 2.1.2) contains components for general species and at-risk species.
- Possible management approaches are found in Appendix 3.
- Many components in the Ecosystem Integrity section (2.1.1) and Social and Economic and Integrated Multiple Uses section (2.2). support species as well.
- The Conservation Watershed Network is mapped in Appendix 1 and described in Appendix 4.
- Appendix 9 provides grizzly bear plan direction.
- Appendix 10 provides lynx plan direction.

Status of Work on this Topic

Effective January of 2024, the wolverine is a federally listed species under the Endangered Species Act. Therefore, it is included in the proposed action as an at-risk species. It is possible that other species status changes could occur during the plan revision. In addition, conservation strategies and other supporting strategies may evolve. One example is the conservation strategy for the grizzly bear Bitterroot Ecosystem, which is under development. New science that may inform future lynx management strategies is also a topic of interest. The proposed action is consistent with currently available strategies for at-risk species, and the LNF will stay apprised of potential changes as the process unfolds. With respect to general species diversity, LNF revision staff are working closely with cooperating agencies, such as Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and Tribes, on management approaches for species, including but not limited to

at-risk species, big game species, and aquatic species. These conversations will also continue to evolve. See also the [Species Designations](#) FAQ on the Web Hub for more information.

Fire Refugia

Proposed Action Content

- A plan component can be found in the forested vegetation section, in Chapter 2 section 2.1.1.
- Other related content includes old growth, species diversity, and fire and fuels plan components.

Status of Work on this Topic

The importance of fire refugia has been brought forward by the public, and is related to old growth conservation, connectivity, and climate change adaptation strategies. The team anticipates further analytical work to support refinements to plan content.

Ongoing Work with the Public

Finally, there are other topics that are of high public interest based on engagements thus far. The LNF anticipates that these topics are likely to vary by alternative based on continued work with the public. Many other topics are also of high public interest and may vary by alternative; this document is not an exhaustive summary of all the potential issues that will be addressed in the revision process.

Timber

Proposed Action Content

- Timber topics in Chapter 2, section 2.3, including suitability and volume metrics.
- Maps of timber suitability and lands where harvest can occur are in Appendix 1.
- Appendix 3 includes possible management approaches.

Status of Work on this Topic

Timber suitability, timber management, and timber output metrics are of high public interest. The Proposed Action identifies lands that are suitable

for timber production. Harvest is allowed on lands that are unsuitable for timber production for other multiple use purposes unless harvest is prohibited. The Proposed Action also includes objectives for the projected wood sale quantity and projected timber sale quantity, and a standard for the sustainable yield limit. Modeling and analysis to define a proposed harvest schedule (acres and type of harvest) is ongoing and will be disclosed in Appendix 3 in the draft plan at the next phase of planning. See also the [Timber Production and Harvest](#) FAQ and the [Timber Production and Harvest Process Paper](#) on the Web Hub.

Recommended Wilderness

Proposed Action Content

- Recommended wilderness areas are addressed as Management Area 2, in Chapter 4.
- Maps are provided in Appendix 1.
- Appendix 3 contains possible management approaches.
- Appendix 8 discloses the results of the wilderness evaluation process.

Status of Work on this Topic

The Forest Service has heard concerns about the location and amount of recommended wilderness areas and the suitable uses within them, including but not limited to motorized over snow use and mountain bike use. The Proposed Action carries forward the recommended wilderness areas from the 1986 Land Management Plan; these areas contain a high level of wilderness characteristics based on the wilderness evaluation. Of these areas, the Great Burn has received substantial public interest. Several areas that are not recommended in the proposed action have also been the focus of public input. See the [Recommended Wilderness](#) FAQ on the Web Hub.

Climate Change

Proposed Action Content

- There are climate change, and carbon storage and sequestration sections in the proposed action (Chapter 2, section 2.2.1).
- Other sections include components that reference or address climate change, including forested vegetation, old growth, watershed, at-risk species, social and economic sustainability, and recreation.
- Possible management approaches are found in Appendix 3.

Overview and Status of this Topic

Climate change continues to be a primary ecological and land management issue. It is the subject of emerging regulatory framework, scientific information, and high public interest. A recent example of national direction includes Executive Order 14072: Strengthening the Nation's Forests, Communities, and Local Economies (2022). The Lolo's plan components also align with several guiding agency strategies: the National Climate Action Plan and the Region 1 Climate Action Plan. See the [Climate Change](#) and the [Carbon Storage and Sequestration](#) FAQ's on the Web Hub for more information on these topics.

Fire, Fuels, and the Wildland Urban Interface

Proposed Action Content

- Fire, Fuels, and Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) plan components can be found in Chapter 2, section 2.1.1.
- There are components that tie to the WUI, but a map is not included in the plan to allow for changes over time.
- Components in many other sections relate to fire, fuels, and the WUI, such as forested vegetation, old growth, watershed, at-risk species, soils, recreation, land uses, and timber.

- Possible management approaches are provided in Appendix 3.

Status of Work on this Topic

Fire and fuels is a topic of high interest for several reasons, including the importance of fire as a natural disturbance, the impacts of climate change and other factors on fire regimes, the risks to communities and other values, and controversy surrounding scientific information and the effects of fuel treatments. Plan content related to fire and fuels management, including in the WUI, aligns with the National Cohesive Wildland Fire Management Strategy, the Wildfire Crisis Strategy, and Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs).

How to be Involved

The public is invited to continue engaging on these topics. The best way to be involved is to review the proposed action and submit comments. The public is also invited to attend public engagements during the scoping period. Collaborative or other groups may consider discussing and formulating collective comments. Input during scoping may:

- Identify or refine preliminary issues. Issues will inform the development alternatives and help identify the topics that need a “deeper dive” with public engagement.
- Identify topics where more discussion on best available scientific information (BASI) is needed. This will help the team review BASI and inform strategies for science-focused public engagements or reviews.

Summary

The plan revision process is adapting to emerging information and this work will continue to evolve throughout the process. Comments received on the proposed action will aid in the development of plan content for these and other topics.

Please refer to the other resources provided on the [Lolo Plan Revision Web Hub](#) to support your review and comment on the proposed action.