



Forest Service
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE



Foundations of Revision Webinar

Questions & Answers

March 13, 2024

1) Can you clarify the statement about science in publications not being the best information?

The regulations require us to use the best available scientific information. This may often be peer reviewed literature, articles, scientific data, and assessments considered professionally published science. But it may also include data or information from the public or other agencies, traditional ecological knowledge, or other sources of scientific information, such as expert opinion, expert panels, monitoring information, inventories, or observational data. The Responsible Official shall identify and use the best available scientific information (BASI) to inform the planning process and document how BASI was determined to be accurate, reliable, and relevant to issues being considered. The BASI includes relevant ecological, social, and economic scientific information. Use of BASI will be documented for the different phases of the revision process. The regulations do not require that we develop additional scientific information, but that planning should be based on scientific information that is already available.

2) Is there a formalized system of how the information provided by the public will be used in decision making? There have been situations in the past where it was unclear and not transparent as to how the information being provided was being used.

Increased transparency is one goal for this plan revision. For instance, questions and answers from these Wednesday webinars will be posted to the plan revision website. We will summarize feedback received at the April community workshops and post that online as well. In addition to the requirements to offer written comment periods and respond to those as part of the NEPA process, the decision rationale and public involvement sections of the final Record of Decision will discuss the themes that the responsible official heard and how they incorporated those into the decisions and/or why they did not incorporate some themes heard through outreach efforts including comment.

3) In light of the housing crisis across the country, what is the policy regarding long term encampments on the Forest?

The Forest Services uses Forest Orders to enforce limits on occupancy and use on National Forests. The Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) describes the different types of use that can be restricted or prohibited on

National Forest System lands (36 CFR 261.50 and 261.58), including camping for a period longer than allowed by Forest Order. Currently, Forest Orders are in place for various areas of the Tongass National Forest, often differing by Ranger District and specific campgrounds. Some of the most restrictive areas limit use to no more than 14 days of occupancy per year; some of the least restrictive locations limit use to no more than 14 days per 60-day period. Forest Service law enforcement officers enforce these orders.

4) You mentioned how one reason the revised plan will be different than the 1997 forest plan is because the rules and requirements have changed. Can you say a bit more about this?

For the revised plan, we'll be operating under the 2012 planning rule whereas the 1997 forest plan was developed under the older, 1982 planning rule. The 1982 regulations were more prescriptive and included concepts that have become outdated (e.g. management indicator species). The 2012 planning rule adds substantive requirements to maintain ecological integrity and involve tribes, other governments, and the general public in a meaningful collaborative Plan revision process. The focus in the rule on maintaining diversity of native plant and animal species has not changed however the approach has. The 2012 planning rule also focuses on other elements, such as recreation, ecosystem services, carbon sequestration, climate change, and others not mentioned in the older rule. The new planning rule requires us to manage more holistically and with a larger focus on science and collaboration. See also [Planning Rule - FAQs \(usda.gov\)](#)

5) How do groups become included as a stakeholder in the plan revision process?

We are in the initial stage of reaching out to everyone - Tribes, agencies, partner organizations, and general public - to see how they want to be engaged. We are actively trying to connect people with all of our engagement opportunities, so they are informed and know where we are at in the process.

At this initial stage, we highly encourage everyone go to the website and sign up for GovDelivery email notifications. If you would like additional information, materials, or a presentation, we can provide that and there is a place to request that on the website. There is a plan revision inbox where you can submit questions. We are striving for multi-faceted engagement with online webinars, community workshops, and reaching out to everyone that we can. If your organization would like to have a live or virtual presentation from our planning team, please reach out by following the link so we can coordinate one together.

6) Will there be a process similar to NEPA scoping for the need to change?

In the future we will have two separate documents. One is the assessment, which will discuss current conditions and trends on the Forest. A separate document will be called the preliminary need to change. Both will have public comment periods similar to scoping. These documents will be released to the public with opportunities for written comment. We may simultaneously have public meetings to get feedback and to answer any questions. We anticipate the draft assessments being posted for review and comment in early 2025.

For more information or to sign up for our email distribution list, please refer to the Tongass Revision Website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/tongass/landmanagement/planning/?cid=fseprd1105492>