

**National Advisory
Committee for
Implementation of the
National Forest System
Land Management
Planning Rule**

May 23, 2016

Tom Vilsack
Secretary, Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Thomas L. Tidwell
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-0003

- Mike Anderson, *The Wilderness Society*
- William Barquin, *Kootenai Tribe of Idaho*
- Susan Jane Brown, *Blue Mountains Forest Partners*
- Robert Cope, *Lemhi County Commissioner, ID (Ret.)*
- Adam Cramer, *Outdoor Alliance*
- Daniel Dessecker, *Ruffed Grouse Society*
- Russ Ehnes, *National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council*
- James Magagna, *Wyoming Stock Growers Association*
- Joan May, *San Miguel County Commissioner, CO*
- Peter Nelson, *Defenders of Wildlife*
- Martin Nie, *University of Montana*
- Candice Price, *Urban American Outdoors*
- Vickie Roberts, *Shelton Roberts Properties*
- Greg Schaefer, *Arch Coal, Inc. (Ret.)*
- Angela Sondenaa, *Nez Perce Tribe*
- Rodney Stokes, *Michigan Governor's Office (Ret.)*
- Christopher Topik, *The Nature Conservancy*
- Thomas Troxel, *Intermountain Forest Association*
- Ray Vaughan, *Noted Author and Raconteur*
- Lindsay Warness, *Boise Cascade Company*

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell:

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (Committee) supports the 2012 Rule's requirements to provide robust, transparent and balanced public participation opportunities within forest planning. Public engagement in the wilderness evaluation process has been somewhat problematic because of varying public expectations and understanding of the process within the 2012 rule. The attached recommendation addresses the need for greater public outreach and education on all phases of the wilderness process. The Committee looks forward to working with the agency to develop effective outreach material and identify best management practices.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the National Advisory Committee,



Susan Jane Brown
Co-Chair



Rodney Stokes
Co-Chair

Recommendation: Public Participation in Wilderness Evaluation Process

Problem statement: Public engagement in the wilderness evaluation process has been somewhat problematic because of varying public expectations and understanding of the process consistent with the 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1975 Eastern Wilderness Act and other applicable laws.

Issues:

1. Public misunderstanding of what the wilderness evaluation process is and the difference between the 2012 Planning Rule process and previous planning processes.
2. Public mistrust that has led to acrimony among different stakeholders and the Forest Service and a rush to declare affirmative statements about lands administratively proposed for wilderness designation by Congress prior to understanding all of the steps and criteria associated with the new 2012 planning process.

Recommendation:

1. Develop a national public FAQ sheet with the assistance of the FACA committee that describes, in detail, the four-stage wilderness evaluation process and opportunities for public engagement.
 - a. This FAQ sheet should explain each phase of the wilderness process and what types of feedback are desired.
 - b. This FAQ sheet should explain agency needs for engagement and feedback that are most helpful in the process and promote a successful outcome.
2. Create a video and other media that all national forests can use to help explain the 2012 wilderness evaluation process.
3. The Forest Service should work with the Committee to develop a set of promising practices for engaging the public in the wilderness evaluation process. The promising practices should cover all phases of the process, starting with the initial public meeting on the wilderness inventory.