

National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule

**Promising Practices for Public Participation in the Wilderness Evaluation Process**

The Committee recommends that the following list of suggestions and observations on public participation should be a living document -- a starting point that should be continually updated based on lessons learned through the Forest Service's and the public's experience with implementing the Chapter 70 process. The Committee intends "public" to include state, local, and tribal governments, as well as the general public, non-governmental organizations, and other stakeholders.

Public Meetings

- Initial Wilderness Meeting:
  - The initial public meeting on the wilderness process should occur prior to completing the inventory.
  - After the introduction, the Forest Service should show the wilderness process video and distribute the detailed wilderness process FAQ.
  - Pre-define GIS layers to show how the wilderness inventory will be built.
  - If portions of the wilderness inventory have already been completed, any maps depicting the inventory should be the **last thing** shown at the public meeting.
  - At this meeting the Forest Service should:
    - Explain the difference between congressionally designated wilderness and administratively recommended wilderness (defined in the Forest Plan).
    - Inform the public that the Forest Service is not required to recommend wilderness under a new Forest Plan.
    - Clarify the type of public feedback desired for this specific step in the wilderness process.
    - Explain the criteria and methodology that will be used to build the wilderness inventory, and ask for public feedback.
    - Clarify that this is only an inventory and evaluation process and that full opportunity to discuss the positive and negative impacts of a recommended wilderness classification will be available during plan development and consideration of alternatives.
- Consider using open houses with several workstations staffed by Forest Service personnel. Decentralized workstations could eliminate grandstanding, yet still offer a forum for people to learn about the process and provide feedback to the agency.
  - Example: Across the country, early public meetings in the travel planning process were raucous. Several forests decided to take the open house format, which helped neutralize the process.
- Consider holding field trips. Getting into the field can help facilitate a more productive, substantive conversation by focusing the discussion around real places. The agency could also consider hosting a sample field inventory with participants to help explain the inventory and evaluation process. Field trips should involve visits to areas with wilderness character and areas that contain improvements.
  - Example: The Cibola hosted a field trip to Little Water Canyon and all sides agreed the trip with useful and brought about a more productive dialogue.
- Efforts to explain the Ch. 70 process prior to releasing inventory maps are useful.
  - Example: The Carson and Santa Fe are doing this.
- Consider bundling Ch. 70 meetings with other elements of the plan revision process where it makes sense. The pre-meetings mentioned in the previous bullet could be combined with initial

## National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule

meetings that explain the forest plan revision process, where the agency discusses land use allocations, management areas, and the wild and scenic river inventory, among other things.

- Certain issues may be repeatedly raised at forest planning meetings and in discussions with the public, such as forest products gathering, hunting, or grazing. It could be that many individuals are concerned about a narrow set of issues, and these issues might be getting aired at meetings related to the Ch. 70 process because it is the only forum to discuss these matters. Consider holding public meetings on issues that seem to be of primary concern to the public in addition to meetings related to the wilderness recommendation process.
- Some of the issues raised at Ch. 70 meetings may not have anything to do with forest planning or wilderness, like frustrations over past road closures, discontent from land grant communities regarding disagreements over historic ownership of the land that date back for centuries, and a general discontent with the federal government and the Forest Service. While recognizing the importance of local community concerns, it is important to distinguish between concerns regarding wilderness recommendations and those unrelated to the scope of this forest planning process.
- Consider holding more, smaller forums that are focused on individual stakeholder groups instead of a few large public meetings.
- Attempt to reach out to community leaders to find opportunities to co-host meetings.
- While it is important to hold public meetings at obvious check-in points in the planning process (release of inventory maps, DEIS), consider holding meetings on an ongoing basis, even during “down-time,” to create a true dialogue with the public and to ensure they understand the process.
- Consider holding forest planning 101 and Ch. 70 presentations for groups upon request. Agency staff could also pilot something like a recurring morning meeting where staff make themselves available and the public can drop in to meet with them to discuss issues. This kind of interaction with the public shows that the Forest Service is responsive to the public’s requests, demonstrates commitment to a transparent process, gives the public an opportunity to interact with planning staff which could help build trust, and helps cultivate educated public participation.

### Language barriers

- Consider having a translator available at public meetings.
- Consider meeting notices and announcements in dual-languages.
- At open house public meetings, consider having a station in Spanish with a Spanish-speaking Forest Service staff person on hand.
- For any fact sheets, handouts or other print/online materials, consider making these tools available in English and Spanish.

### Technology barriers

- At public meetings, have a sign-up sheet for people who don’t have internet access so they can be mailed hard copy notices.
- Publish public meeting announcements in newspapers and on local radio stations.

### Tools To Educate and Engage the Public

## National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule

- Webinars and online videos are helpful tools to explain the process to people unable to attend in-person meetings. Webinars create an environment where people feel safe about sharing ideas.
  - Example: Carson developed instructional videos.
- Interactive online mapping tools seem to help drive more substantive feedback from the public.
- Online storyboards are useful in terms of explaining the process.
- Fact sheets that correct common misunderstandings about wilderness (e.g., hunting and grazing are allowed) are useful.
- Fact sheets and infographics that explain the Ch. 70 and forest planning process are useful (see attached Region 4 infographic using a funnel to illustrate the amount of land under consideration at different steps of the process).
- Provide an opportunity for the public to provide input on the methods being used to conduct the wilderness inventory and evaluation.

### Targeted Outreach

- Brief elected officials or their staff so that they understand the process and maps prior to maps being released.
- Consider one-on-one meetings with community leaders to better understand local concerns and issues.

### Visual Recommendations for Inventory Maps

- Show existing Inventoried Roadless Area boundaries and designated Wilderness Areas on maps.
- Show Motor Vehicle Use Maps of roads and trails, as well as non-motorized trails. Clarify that any decommissioned or closed (Maintenance Level 1) roads shown are already closed to public use.
- Show private inholdings.

### Communications

- Consider explaining the benefits of periodically conducting an inventory of lands that may be suitable for wilderness. For example, the agency routinely conducts assessments for a host of resources such as watershed condition, timber suitability, recreation opportunities and facilities, climate vulnerability, invasive species, and so on. Some of these inventories occur during forest planning and some occur outside of forest planning. Inventories provide a snapshot in time regarding the condition of the forest. This information is necessary to collect in order to understand conditions and trends over time.
- The inventory is just step-one in the process and is intended to cast a wide net and be inclusive so that the agency does not overlook any lands. There will be ample opportunity to comment throughout the entirety of the process over the next few years.
- Recent decisions in the travel management planning process (Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM)) will be used to inform the roadless inventories. The Chapter 70 process is not a forum to close roads. In fact, the forest plan revision process will not make any decisions relative to road and trail designations. It will stick to the decisions made during travel planning.
- Explain the difference between recommended wilderness identified through the Chapter 70 process and congressionally designated wilderness. This explanation should include a discussion of the difference between these designations, and how the Forest Service manages these areas.
- Inform the public that the Forest Service is not required to recommend wilderness under a new Forest Plan.

National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land  
Management Planning Rule

Wilderness Evaluation

- Commences after the finalization of the assessment.
- The Forest Service and the public should work together to develop questions and measures, consistent with the Ch. 70 directives, that address criteria for wilderness characteristics, including 1) apparent naturalness and substantially unnoticeable impacts; 2) opportunities for solitude or primitive recreation; 3) features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value; and 4) manageability.
- Using these questions and measures, the Forest Service should develop a methodology that consistently applies the criteria to the wilderness inventory maps to further define what may be appropriate to move forward into the analysis stage.

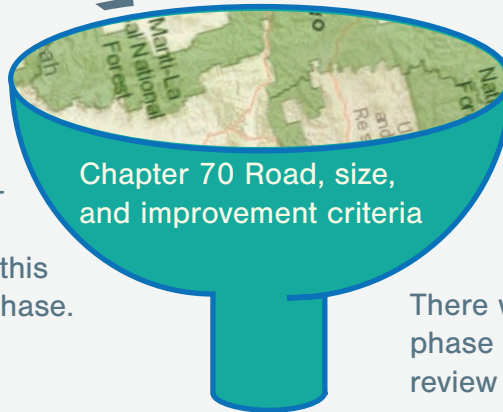
# IMPLEMENTATION of the REGION 4 WILDERNESS EVALUATION PROCESS

THE FOREST SERVICE WILL APPLY THE FOLLOWING PROCESS PER CHAPTER 70 DIRECTION:

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IS IMPORTANT AT EACH PHASE OF THE PROCESS. COMMENTS SHOULD FOCUS ON THE FOLLOWING:

## INVENTORY

This phase is broad and inclusive. The inventory will apply the size, road and other improvement criteria to the entire Forest administrative boundary. The result is a set of polygons (areas) that meet this criteria and move on to the next phase.



- providing any on-the-ground knowledge or corrections to the improvement and roads data.
- providing information on use trends (popular mtn biking routes, or ohv areas.)

There will be opportunities for comment on this phase through public meetings and an informal review period.

## EVALUATION

The criteria applied during the evaluation phase is based on the areas Wilderness Character described in the Wilderness Act. This criteria is used to determine if the polygons identified in the inventory phase have Wilderness Characteristics. The result of this phase is a report describing the Wilderness Characteristics of each polygon.



- providing comments regarding the areas Wilderness characteristics. Comments should be specific and apply any on-the-ground knowledge about the criteria used to evaluate these areas.

There will be workshops, meetings, and an informal review period for public comment.

## ANALYSIS

During the Analysis phase the Forest will select which areas to bring forward into a range of alternatives for the analysis as part of the Forest Plan Revision Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The analysis will disclose what the impacts would be as a result of recommending or not recommending any areas included in the alternatives.



During the first part of this phase, public involvement should focus on providing feedback on developing alternatives and deciding which, if any areas to include for further analysis. Once determined, participation and comments should focus on the analysis of impacts for the range of alternatives. At this phase there will be public meetings and a formal public comment period.

## RECOMMENDATION

In the final phase of this process the Forest Supervisor will issue a decision on whether to recommend specific areas for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System based on the analysis disclosed in the final EIS for the proposed revised forest plan, developed with input received during public participation opportunities. Several reviews occur within the Department of Agriculture for these areas, and ultimately Congress has reserved the authority to make final decisions on Wilderness designation. For lands in the inventory and evaluation that were not recommended for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, the decision document must briefly identify and describe what management direction is provided in the plan for those lands.