

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

- Mike Anderson, *The Wilderness Society*
- William Barquin, *Kootenai Tribe of Idaho*
- Susan Jane Brown, *Western Environmental Law Center*
- Robert Cope, *Lambi 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.*
- Angela Sondenaa, *Nez Perce Tribe*
- Rodney Stokes, *Citizen-at-Large*
- Christopher Topik, *The Nature Conservancy*
- Thomas Troxel, *Intermountain Forest Association*
- Ray Vaughan, *Citizen-at-Large*
- Lindsay Warness, *Boise Cascade Company*

April 5, 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

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell:

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the 2012 National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (the Committee) held its sixth meeting of the new charter on March 8-9th, 2016 in Washington, DC. At this meeting, we were joined in our deliberations by Associate Chief Mary Wagner, Deputy Chief Leslie Weldon, Associate Deputy Chief Brian Ferebee, and USDA Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary Meryl Harrell, which allowed the Committee to share our observations directly with Forest Service leadership. We greatly appreciate their engagement.

During our conversation with Agency and Department leadership, we discussed several high-level issues such as the structure of the Forest Service and its traditional culture and whether those are commensurate with the innovative framework of the 2012 Planning Rule, and moreover the challenges of forest planning in the 21st century. While no conclusions were drawn, there was a great deal of creative thinking that we will continue to pursue. We also explored the need for more robust partnerships leading to collective or co-leadership¹ on forest management issues, the need to engage the public in planning in a way that does not exhaust stakeholders, and the role of risk and uncertainty in land management planning. These are some of the key challenges of delivering on the promise of the 2012 Planning Rule in a resource (personnel, time, funding) constrained world.

Between our January and March Committee meetings, several working and learning calls were held with Committee members, Forest Service staff, and other stakeholders. Many of these conversations were organized around the Chief's challenge to the Committee ("Chief's Challenge") to think creatively about innovative pilot efforts or

systemic best practices that could be utilized by the Forest Service to better implement the 2012 Planning Rule. Some of our working groups have begun developing these pilot concepts, and others are currently engaged in developing recommendations that reflect the Chief's Challenge. This memo summarizes the key discussion points and outcomes from the March 2016 meeting with the goal of maintaining regular communication between the Committee and executive leadership of the Department and Forest Service, and to update you on our progress in meeting the Chief's Challenge.

Evaluation of the 2012 Planning Rule.

The Committee approved a tool that can be used by the Forest Service to review and measure success of implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule. The final recommendations from the full Committee regarding evaluation of the 2012 Planning Rule will be forwarded to you under separate cover.

Integration of wildfire considerations in planning.

The fire work group is developing a checklist for forests designed to facilitate incorporation of the principles of the Cohesive Fire Strategy during forest plan revisions. We hope to have recommendations for approval by the Committee at our May 2016 meeting in Charleston, SC.

Adaptive Management.

This subcommittee is developing a rubric based on the rule and directives to evaluate plan components (desired conditions, standards and guidelines, objectives, goals and monitoring) in the context of setting up effective adaptive management. They will use the evaluation rubric to review draft forest plans between the May and July meetings, and findings will then be explored and applied in a workshop with Regional Planning Directors, tentatively scheduled for the September 2016 Committee meeting. The workshop would be designed to provide a "fail-safe" environment for planners to practice drafting plan components, and is an example of a pilot effort that fits neatly within the Chief's Challenge.

Wilderness Subcommittee.

The wilderness subcommittee has completed a draft recommendation on pre-assessment work which will be attached under separate cover. They continue to discuss the need for robust public involvement and smarter public engagement strategies in all four steps of the process. This Subcommittee's response to the Chief's Challenge included the possibility of bundling steps, and/or outsourcing parts of the process to partners to increase efficiencies.

Species of Conservation Concern.

The SCC work group has recently completed a series of telephone interviews with stakeholders involved in revisions across the country to learn more about public perceptions of the species of conservation concern (SCC) process. The Stakeholder Summary Report prepared by the Committee's facilitators as well as the Forest Service's internal SCC Enquiry Report can be found on BaseCamp, and reflect significant convergence with respect to key challenges. These include a desire for: earlier identification of SCCs, enhanced transparency on rationale for

inclusion/exclusion, better citation of the best available science used for determinations, more clarification on the roles of the Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors, and greater consistency across units. The Committee expects to continue its work on SCCs between now and our May meeting, and this includes a memo describing the parallel findings of the Committee's and USFS's reports.

Outreach and Public Engagement.

The outreach work group is currently working on a draft list of promising practices- a list of key challenges observed in the field with recommendations to alleviate these issues, and an on-line and printable brochure to direct people towards the Citizens' Guide, the text of which was recently completed. We expect to have draft recommendations on promising practices for full Committee approval at our May meeting.

In addition, we are pleased to inform you that the full Committee has completed the text for Citizens' Guide and Government Guide, which are now available on the FACA Committee's website: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/planningrule/committee>. We are very excited about the rollout of these Guides. Committee members have already noted a demand for these tools in ongoing planning efforts, and we hope they will help the public and governments better understand how to engage in the forest plan revision process.

Forest Plan Amendments under the 2012 Planning Rule.

The Committee began a conversation about how the 2012 Planning Rule is and will be used to amend forest plans, in particular plans developed under the 1982 planning rule. Adaptive management and the corresponding ability (or necessity) to amend forest plans is a cornerstone of the 2012 Planning Rule, so it is essential that the amendment process is workable, has the desired outcomes, and leads to more efficient forest planning. In particular, the Committee is very interested in how the Forest Service and stakeholders are engaging on the Tongass National Forest, which is the first forest to use the 2012 Planning Rule to amend a 1982-rule forest plan. However, this issue is much broader than just the Tongass National Forest, as other national forests will be contending with amendments of 1982-era forest plans using the 2012 Planning Rule now that the transition period (May 9, 2015) has passed. 36 C.F.R. § 219.17(b)(2). We expect to continue this conversation in depth at our next meeting in May 2016, and expect to deliberate issues such as the scope and construction of amendments, procedural and sequencing matters, and integration of new information.

Agency Transitions.

The Committee has taken a particular interest in understanding and addressing the challenges posed by Forest Service transitions when Line Officers or staff transfer or retire during an ongoing forest planning process. Ecosystem Management Coordination staff reported that the Committee's transition memo and recommendations are currently in the clearance process, and that once this process is complete, the memo will be distributed to the field. In addition, the transition memo will be delivered to forests during the orientation meeting between the Washington Office and forests just beginning the revision process. The Washington Office plans

to facilitate a “lessons learned” workshop between forests currently going through revision, and those about to begin the process, to discuss the revision process, including the importance of managing turnover. The Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of our recommendations on this issue.

In our effort to model good behavior, we would also like to mention that the Committee is acutely aware that the second set of FACA Committee appointments is nearing an end in September 2016. While many of our members may reapply for membership on the Committee, undoubtedly some of our members will transition off. Consequently, the Coordinating Committee is currently discussing the best way to transition these members off the Committee and welcome new members to ensure we retain significant “institutional knowledge”. The Committee will discuss this transition strategy at our May 2016 meeting; we expect to utilize many of the principles from our ‘Transition Memo’ that we recommended to you in our effort to smooth this upcoming inevitable transition.

Conclusion.

As you can see, our Committee is very busy working through a myriad of topics in our quest to “*learn locally and advise nationally.*” As we approach the end of our second term, the Committee remains highly motivated and engaged in addressing the challenges of land and resource management planning across the National Forest System. Indeed, as we increase the pace with which we are transmitting recommendations to the Department and Chief, we have begun to discuss the best method for following through on, and following up with, the efficacy of our recommendations. Forest Service leadership has indicated that an accountable process to review and assess our recommendations is a priority, and we look forward to continued dialogue about how best to engage in “adaptive management” around the implementation of our recommendations.

Our next Committee meeting will be held in Charleston, SC on May 10-12th 2016, with an optional field trip to the Francis-Marion National Forest on May 9th. We look forward to continuing our dialogue with the Forest Service in Charleston.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the National Advisory Committee,



Susan Jane Brown
Co-Chair



Rodney Stokes
Co-Chair

ⁱ FN1: The FACA Government Guide addresses this issue by observing that “while the Forest Service cannot delegate its ultimate decision-making authority, a goal of intergovernmental participation should be to identify opportunities to contribute to mutual objectives, resolve or reduce conflicts, and achieve mutually agreeable outcomes with State, local and tribal governments.”