

August 13, 2016

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, *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.*
- Angela Sondana, *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*

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 eighth meeting of the second charter from July 12<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016 in Portland, Oregon. As you know, the last meeting of the second charter is scheduled for August 30<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 in Washington, DC. This means that the next six weeks will be a key time for the Committee as we wrap up our ongoing conversations, formulate recommendations where appropriate, identify priority issues for the next charter, and discuss how to facilitate a smooth transition from this charter to the next in a manner that retains our institutional knowledge and prevents lost ground/time.

An important issue for the Committee has been to work with the agency to improve the Forest Service's personnel transition process, and we hope to model good practices by facilitating a smooth transition for our own Committee membership. To that end, continuing members will mentor those joining the Committee for the third Charter to bring them up to speed on the Committee's activities. We look forward to engaging with our prospective Committee members over the next two years.

### **Co-Leadership.**

At the Portland meeting, we were joined by Associate Chief Leslie Weldon, Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Pena, and most of the Regional Planning Directors from across the nation. We continued our dialogue with leadership about "co-leadership" of the national forests, and the need for strong partnerships to ensure that planning under the 2012 Planning Rule is successful. Our conversation focused on some of the institutional or cultural barriers to realizing the integrated resource management vision of the new Planning Rule, and we discussed what shifts

would need to occur to better align Forest Service culture, policy, practice, and leadership with the aspiration of the Rule.

One issue that we have discussed over the past several meetings and we invite you to continue discussing with us at our August meeting in Washington, DC is: *What is the role of forest plans?* While this question may appear to have a simple answer, the Committee has found that there may be significant differences of opinion. We believe that this conversation deserves specific attention, so we plan to devote important time to this topic at our August meeting.

### **Dialogue with Region 6.**

As mentioned above, we were joined by Pacific Northwest Regional Forester Jim Pena, Regional Planning Director Julia Riber, and several members of the R6 planning staff. We appreciated hearing about the planning challenges facing this Region, which has not yet embarked on revising forest plans using the new Planning Rule. In addition, the Committee heard from Oregon State University professor Dr. Norm Johnson, one of the “Gang of Four” who drafted the Northwest Forest Plan, about the importance of scientifically credible conservation strategies for species and ecosystems.

### **Citizens’ and Government Guides.**

The Committee celebrated the completion of the internet version of the Citizens’ Guide and Government Guide to the 2012 Planning rule, and reviewed large coffee table-size print versions of the Guides. Committee members have received a constant stream of requests for both guides, and we have found them very useful in conversations we have had with stakeholders in our respective regions. We are starting to work with the Forest Service to develop a comprehensive and effective communication strategy for internal and external outreach around the Guides to ensure that these valuable resources are available and useful to stakeholders. Finally, we plan to hold a signing ceremony for the guides at our August meeting, and hope you will be able to join us and add your signature to the long list of partners who helped us develop these indispensable tools.

### **Amendments Utilizing the 2012 Planning Rule.**

As we explained in our last memo to you, the Committee has been working closely with the Forest Service and Department to identify and resolve challenges with amending existing forest plans with the 2012 Planning Rule. At our meeting in Portland, we dedicated several intense hours to discussing potential solutions to the identified problems, and provided consensus input into not only a conceptual framework that would address the issues, but also regulatory language that will form the basis for an amendment to the 2012 Rule that addresses the ambiguity regarding amendments. This was a great opportunity to observe the power of this Committee, as many different Committee members with different constituencies were equally engaged in brainstorming and problem-solving; it was clear that our membership believes in the value of the Rule and the need to ensure that its adaptive management vision is realized through a rational and reasonable amendment process. We understand that the Forest Service will use our advice in

a rulemaking effort that will be complete before the end of 2016, and look forward to continuing to work closely with the agency as you enter and complete the rulemaking process.

### **Review of Early Adopter Forest Plans.**

The Committee is in the process of reviewing draft plans from the Early Adopter forests. To date, the Committee has reviewed the Francis-Marion, Flathead, and Sierra National Forest revised plans, and plans to review the Cibola, Sierras, and El Yunque plans as they become available. We have used a Committee-created review framework that allows us to review plan components and compare them to the requirements of the Rule, which has allowed us to discuss the integrity of these plans. We have focused our review on socioeconomic considerations, the appropriate balance of plan components (flexibility vs. accountability), the use of monitoring to inform management, and how plans address at risk species.

The Committee appreciates the willingness of the planning staffs on these Early Adopter forests to share their thinking with us so as to provide a context for their revision efforts. The Committee has engaged in rich dialogue on these complex issues and looks forward to continuing to learn and deliberate in our next charter.

### **Species of Conservation Concern (SCCs).**

Although we did not spend a great deal of time on it during our Portland meeting, the Committee is looking forward to continuing its work with the Forest Service's cross-program Washington Office staff team on the collaborative development of issue papers to seek policy clarity on SCCs. The issue papers will outline the issues, policy sideboards, current range of variability, the implications of this range of variability, and identify recommendations for moving forward. This is an important and challenging issue surrounding forest plan revision, but we believe that joint action between the Committee and agency personnel will ensure that revised plans are true to the intent of the 2012 Planning Rule.

### **Forthcoming Recommendations.**

At our August meeting, we expect to finalize several formal recommendations that the Committee has been working on over the past two years. Those recommendations include an info-graphic explaining the methods/opportunities for public participation at each stage of the wilderness evaluation process and best management practices for successful public engagement in the revision process. In addition to formal recommendations, we believe that a substantial benefit of the Committee is the dialogue that occurs between the Committee and Forest Service and USDA personnel; we have all learned a great deal from each other, and have demonstrated that by working together, we can develop durable solutions to challenging forest planning issues.

### **Conclusion.**

As forest plans revised under the 2012 Planning Rule begin to come on-line, the Committee remains committed to our mission to "*learn locally, advise nationally*" and to provide thoughtful recommendations to the Chief and Secretary regarding implementation of the new Rule. This is a critical time, as the Forest Service now has four years of experience with the Rule under its belt. Early Adopters are beginning to produce draft forest plans for comment, additional national

forests (“mid-Adopters”) are beginning new revision efforts, and the Committee and agency are better able to discern trends in implementation. The Committee looks forward to continuing our productive collaborative working relationship with you and your staff.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan Jane B".

Susan Jane Brown  
Co-Chair

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Rodney Stokes".

Rodney Stokes  
Co-Chair