

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

August 30, 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

- Mike Anderson, *The Wilderness Society*
- William Barquin, *Kootenai Tribe of Idaho*
- Susan Jane Brown, *Blue Mountains Forest Partners*
- Robert Cope, *Lembi 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 Sondena, *Nez Perce Tribe*

Dear Secretary Vilsack and Chief Tidwell:

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (hereafter Committee) is pleased to offer the attached compendium of recommendations and observations on implementation of the 2012 rule that we believe provide useful insight to support a successful planning process and effective forest plans. This body of recommendations – developed during the Committee’s second charter from September 2014-2016 – further supports and refines the Committee’s original recommendations on the draft directives, conveyed in September 2014.

Over the past two years, the Committee has had the opportunity to work with USFS Forest Service staff at the Washington and Regional Office level to identify areas of critical importance with respect to planning (those issues that are most important, in need of additional guidance, or most likely to cause public discord and/or delays). The Committee has engaged agency support staff, technical experts, revision forest planning teams, and stakeholders across the country involved in plan revisions for the purpose of developing consensus-based, national-level process and policy recommendations and observations to remedy these critical issues. In addition to these formal recommendations, the Committee has also engaged in problem-solving dialogue with 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. As an important part of our collective problem-solving, we request that the agency routinely provide updates on how the Committee’s recommendations are being implemented, their efficacy, and how best to engage in “adaptive management” around the development and conveyance of our recommendations.

As co-chairs, we commend the commitment and attention of the Committee members during this charter. It has been an honor to work with such a professional, experienced and diverse set of

individuals. We also thank the excellent staff of the Forest Service for their support and dedication to collaborative decision-making.

The Committee recognizes that the 2012 rule is new territory for both the agency and public. As such, there is a learning curve for all parties. We look forward to continuing to work with the agency and all parties to identify and amplify what is working well and help problem-solve on that which needs improvement in real time.

Sincerely,



Susan Jane Brown
Co-Chair



Rodney Stokes
Co-Chair

Attachments:

Appendix I - Compendium of Committee Recommendations and Observations conveyed to the agency from September 2014 – 2016

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1. **Assessments - Recommendations on the Development of Assessments (conveyed December 2015)**
 - *Summary: Assessments are an important component of the planning process. As such revision efforts should: 1) make stronger linkages between the assessments and the need-to-change documents; 2) view and use assessments as a crucial part of a more adaptive planning framework; 3) include more robust information on social, cultural, economic and historic uses; 4) consider and adequately respond to the relevant information provided by the public during the assessment phase; and 5) focus on presentation of information to increase utility, functionality (or usability) and applicability.*
2. **Adaptive Management - Programmatic Overview of Implementation of the Rule – Measuring Success (conveyed April 2016)**
 - *Summary: It is important for the Forest Service to evaluate how the 2012 Rule is being implemented – to identify key challenges and/or lessons being learned that can then inform future revision efforts. To aid this, the Committee and has develop a series of questions, based on themes contained in the 2012 Rule and preamble that reflect its aspirations, for the Forest Service to use as a tool in their development of a national oversight process to assess whether revised forest plans are meeting the requirements and intent of the 2012 Planning Rule.*
3. **Public Engagement –**
 - a. **Recommendation that the agency produce a ‘Planning 101’ Video(s) – (conveyed March 2015)**
 - *Summary: Strong and transparent public participation is paramount not only to the planning process but the legacy of our National Forests. To create robust public participation, it is essential that citizens from local rural communities to distant urban centers feel ownership in the process and fully understand the role our forests play and the purpose of a land management plan. To this end, the Committee recommends that the agency produce a ‘Planning 101’ Video(s) – conveying to the American people the importance of our National Forests and explaining the role of forest planning in protecting and managing these public resources.*
 - b. **A Citizens’ Guide to Forest Planning – (conveyed July 2016)**
 - *Summary: The 2012 rule represents a big change in how the Forest Service conducts land management planning and felt strongly that a citizens’ guide was essential to help the public effectively navigate and get involved in the planning process. It is intended to demystify the planning process and provide the public with information on how to be involved, what to expect, and where they can go for more information.*
 - c. **A Guide for State, Local, and Tribal Governments -Understanding Your Opportunities for Participating in the Forest Service Planning Process – (conveyed July 2016)**
 - *Summary: The 2012 Planning Rule places a new focus on coordination, cooperation, and collaboration between governmental interests and the Forest Service. The purpose of this*

guide is to help State, local, and tribal governments better understand their opportunities for being effectively involved in the Forest Service's land management planning process.

- d. Observations on Effective Public Engagement – (conveyed via Memo to the DFO August 2016)
 - *Summary: The Committee has gathered a great deal of information on public engagement from revision forests and stakeholders across the country. These observations have been summarized in a table, highlighting lessons learned. This list provides useful information for current revision forests and those yet to begin plan revision on ways to support and facilitate successful forest planning public engagement.*
4. **Species of Conservation Concern** - Summary of Key Observations from the US Forest Service's SCC Enquiry and the Committee's SCC Stakeholder Summary Report – (conveyed via Memo to the DFO April 2016)
 - *Summary: The memo summarizes key observations from both the Forest Service's SCC Enquiry and the Committee's SCC Stakeholder Summary Report and identifies issues that the Committee would like to continue to explore with the agency including: Sequencing, Lack of Rationale Provided, Inconsistency and lack of a clear process, Lack of integration between SCCs and the overall planning process, Misinterpretation of the 2012 Rule and directives, and Forest Service capacity. *(Based on this information, the USFS has begun work on developing a series of white papers addressing these issues. The Committee will continue to work with the agency on these).*
5. **Turnover** - Recommendations on the Transition Process for Forest Service Leadership and Forest Planning Team Members – (conveyed March 2015)
 - *Summary: To ensure the success of the 2012 Planning Rule, there is a very pressing need for the Forest Service to improve transitions between outgoing personnel and incoming personnel who will assume the responsibility for working directly with these partners and publics.*
6. **Wilderness** –
 - a. Recommendation on Pre-Assessment Wilderness Inventory Work – (conveyed April 2016)
 - *Summary: This recommendation clarifies the Committee's support of beginning wilderness inventory work before the assessment, provided that public and governmental involvement and outreach are adequate and with the expectation that the assessment will influence the final inventory, and recommends that the Washington Office provide written guidance to Forest Service planning teams.*
 - b. Recommendation on Public Participation in the Wilderness Evaluation Process – (conveyed May 2016)
 - *Summary: 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. This recommendation addresses the need for greater public outreach and education on all phases of the wilderness process.*
 - c. Recommendation on a 'USFS Wilderness Public Engagement Info Graphic' – (conveyed August 2016)
 - *Summary: The directives provide limited information about methods/ opportunities for public participation at each stage of the wilderness evaluation process. The Committee has developed a two-page 'info graphic' table to help planners and other public involvement*

specialists understand the major tasks associated with each step in the process and ways in which the public can effectively engage at each step.

d. Observations on Promising Practices for Public Participation in the Wilderness Evaluation Process – (conveyed September 2016)

- *Summary: The Committee has gathered a great deal of information on public engagement from revision forests and stakeholders across the country. Promising practices have been summarized for current revision forests and those yet to begin plan revision on ways to support and facilitate successful forest planning public engagement.*