

APPENDIX 2: PUBLIC MEETING SUMMARY

Public Participation in the Forest Plan Revision Process

Effective public participation is critical during the development of Forest Plans to ensure that the overall management strategy, and individual projects that follow, reflect the diverse needs of people and communities who may be impacted by activities within the planning area.

The 2012 Planning Rule¹ places substantial emphasis on public participation and involvement throughout the entire planning process so that the public is engaged during the development, and not only the review, of the plan. At a minimum, public participation is required:

- During the assessment process;
- When developing a plan proposal;
- On a draft proposal and accompanying NEPA documents;
- At the beginning of the objection period for a new plan, amendment, or revision;
- To approve a final plan; and
- When reviewing the results of monitoring information.

The Planning Rule also establishes general principles of public participation, requires the development of a public participation strategy, describes the public participation requirements at each stage of the planning process, and sets minimum requirements for public notice. Agency guidance on this process can be found in the Forest Service Handbook, FSH 1909.12 – Land Management Planning, Chapter 40 – Public Participation.

Public Engagement Strategy

The purpose of the Public Participation Strategy² is to provide a road map for how the Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) will inform, engage, and collaborate with the public during each phase of the planning process. It also provides a foundation for implementing the 2012 Planning Rule's broad commitment to engaging the public throughout the process. The strategy is a joint product between the Forest and those interested in Plan Revision and will be updated as needed to foster the highest level of public participation and to meet the needs of the public. A companion Communication Plan was also developed to provide specific information on contacts and mechanisms for involving the public and cooperating agencies during Forest Plan Revision.

The Public Participation Strategy strives to:

- Help build and maintain working relationships, trust, capacity and commitment to the Forest Plan Revision.
- Support shared learning and understanding between the Forest Service and public participants.
- Promote a common understanding of facts and issues that form the context for Planning and the Planning process.
- Help keep the public informed throughout sometimes lengthy and complex Planning processes.
- Be an inclusive, transparent process that strengthens Plans and adds clarity to the decision-making process and the rationale for decisions.

¹ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5362536.pdf

² https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd535174.pdf

- Help identify or clarify issues, conflicts, constraints, values, beliefs or expectations.

Public Participation in the Assessment Phase

The intent of public participation in the assessment phase is to provide the opportunity for the public to share its knowledge of existing forest conditions and to identify concerns about trends and perceptions of risks to social, economic, and ecological systems that affect their community (FSH 1909.12).

Dialogue at this early stage of planning, perhaps even more important than information gathering, supports the development of relationships with stakeholders that will continue throughout the planning process.

The Manti-La Sal National Forest used a variety of methods to inform and engage the public during the assessment phase including:

- A Federal Register Notice
- July/August Inaugural Public Open Houses
- September Public Open Houses
- November Public Workshops
- On-line Comment Forms for Wilderness Evaluation and Species of Conservation Concern
- Forest Service Webpage and Story Map

The public was notified of upcoming meetings through letters of invitation to the Forest Plan Revision mailing list, notices posted to the Plan Revision website, radio and newspaper announcements, flyers and marketing at various meetings with local, state, and tribal entities including the Utah State Native American Council, the Utah State Public Lands Policy Coordinating Office, the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food, the Utah Conservation Commission, and the Utah State Legislature.

Assessment Participation Overview

Attendance at the public open houses during the Assessment phase eclipsed historical trends for participation at Manti-La Sal National Forest public meetings. 415 individuals attended the public open houses and workshops between July and November, and nearly 400 written comments were submitted during meetings and through on-line and mail-in opportunities. Figure 1 shows the attendance by locations across the Forest. The likely reasons for the high level of public participation include an aggressive outreach and marketing campaign by the Forest, and an increased public interest in land management issues due to an active political environment surrounding public lands in the State of Utah.

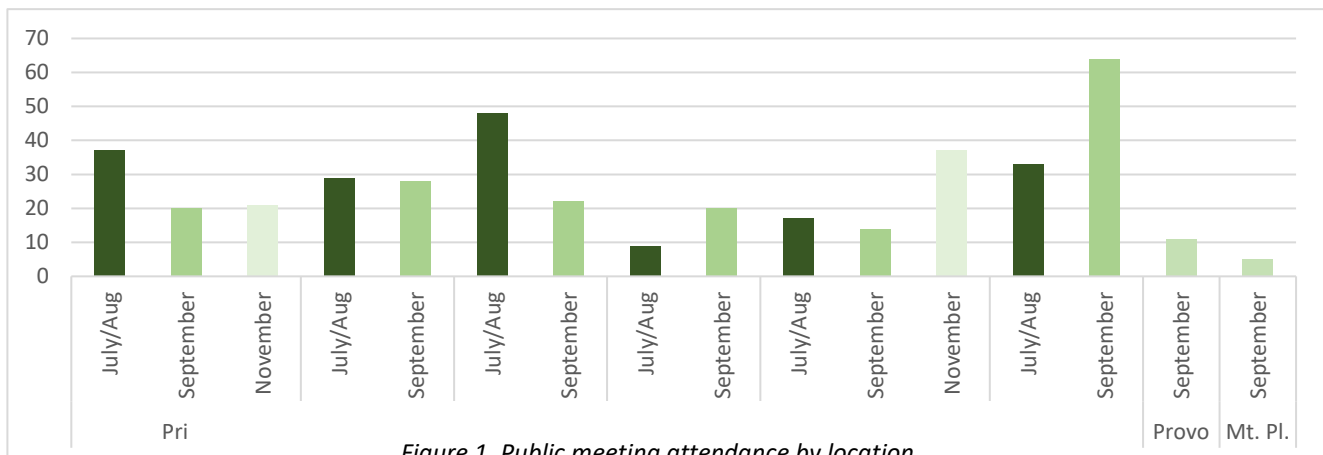


Figure 1. Public meeting attendance by location.

95 percent of public feedback originated locally in the state of Utah, with over 90 percent coming from rural communities near the Forest. This high level of local participation is an encouraging sign of the commitment from an engaged local population that cares deeply about the resources of the Manti-La Sal National Forest.

In addition to providing participants with an understanding of the overall Forest Plan Revision process, and the Assessment Phase, the Forest gained key insight into the issues, trends, and resources that were of greatest importance to the public during the Public Open Houses and Workshops. Questions received during meetings helped to illustrate how the team could better provide information in a usable format to a public, as well as their preferred methods of engagement throughout the process. The following sections provide a brief summary of each public engagement and the general feedback received from the public. Meeting summaries from each event can be found on the Forest Plan Revision website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/main/mantiLaSal/landmanagement/planning>.

Meeting Process

The meeting intent, design, and content varied between the July/August and September Open Houses, and November Public Workshops depending on the Plan Revision phase.

July/August Forest Plan Revision Public Open Houses

The purpose of the July/August public open houses was to both notify and inform the public of the Plan Revision process and to gather initial data about Forest conditions, trends, and areas of public interest. These inaugural public meetings were the first opportunity for the public to learn about Forest Plan Revision and begin to explore their role in the process. The Forest hosted 6 open houses from 6 July 2016 through 6 August 2016 in communities near the Forest including: Price, Castle Dale, Manti, Blanding, Monticello and Moab. A total of 173 individuals participated in these meetings, 65 comments were submitted, and a dozen questions shared with Forest staff.

September Assessment Public Open Houses

In September 2016, the Manti-La Sal National Forest hosted a series of 8 open houses in communities near the Forest. In total, 184 people attended the eight September open houses, with an average of 23 attendees per event. Over the course of the open houses, 100 public comments and a dozen questions were submitted.

The September Public Open Houses sought to achieve three main objectives:

Share with the public the draft SCC list, Wilderness Inventory maps, and the 15 topics covered by the Assessment with specific information on the indicators, scales of analysis, data sources, and stressors, and drivers

Inform the public about upcoming events, Forest Plan Revision updates, the Wild and Scenic River (WSR) evaluation process, and other relevant information

Collect public input on our draft SCC list and Wilderness Inventory map, as well as input on the Assessment topics and data to support the Assessment Report

November Public Workshops

In November 2016, the Manti-La Sal National Forest hosted two public workshops in Monticello and Price, Utah. During these meetings participants were afforded time to have in-depth conversations with specialists around a series of Forest Plan Revision topics including the Assessment, Species of Conservation Concern (SCC), Wilderness, and Analysis of Coal Unsuitability.

In total, 58 people attended the two November workshops. During the course of the workshops over 200 comments were collected from the attendees.

The specific objectives of the November Public Workshops were to:

Gather Input: Provide a public venue for soliciting contributions to the assessment process, SCC, wilderness planning and coal. Public input will improve the final plan by ensuring consideration of differing viewpoints and highlighting issues brought forth from the public.

Foster Shared Learning Among Participants: Encourage stakeholders and other general public participants to talk with each other and share their observations about various planning topics. Shared learning helps participants offer joint solutions and better understand the issues, planning requirements and process for plan development.

Build and Reinforce Positive Relationships: Encourage relationships to form and reinforce relationships both horizontally and vertically. Strong relationships are the key to future collaboration.

Public Feedback

Communication and Participation

During the July/August open houses participants were asked how they preferred to stay informed during plan revision and attendees were most receptive to email, public meetings, and newspaper notices instead of radio announcement, local government, and hard copy mail notices. Social media also outweighed the Forest webpage as a method for notifying the public of planning updates marking a shift towards non-traditional platforms for communication.

When provided with a range of five alternatives for their intended role from Significant to Undecided, 76 percent of respondents intended to play a “significant” or “mostly involved” role in the Forest Plan Revision process and desired to stay informed. This high level of interest from the public will help to ensure that the Forest Plan adequately addresses areas of public concern.

Assessment

At all three meetings participants were provided a list of the 15 Assessment Topic Areas to help frame their understanding and provide a platform for focusing their comments by resource area. During the November workshop participants were walked through a process similar to what Forest Specialists go through in developing their reports by resource area including: gathering information pertaining to Existing Conditions; identifying Historic, Current and Future trends; identifying Stressors and Drivers that affect resources, and providing Management Recommendations to mitigate threats to Forest resources.

Each Assessment Topic received feedback from the public. Travel management (including trails) recreation, grazing, wildlife and watershed were the resource areas of greatest interest to participants as shown in Figure 2.

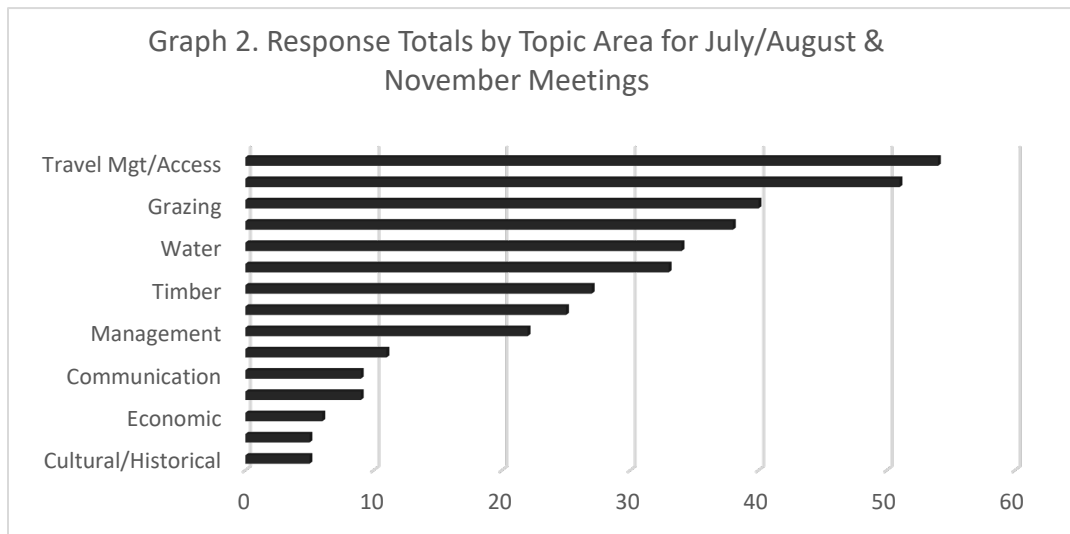


Figure 2. Response totals by topic area for the July, August and November meetings.

Species of Conservation Concern (SCC)

A key component of the September and November meetings was the disclosure of the initial draft SCC lists to the public. In sharing these plant and non-plant SCC lists, the public was asked for its feedback on the process, as well as whether they wanted to add or delete species from the proposed list (Appendix 4).

In general, North Zone respondents did not favor adding species to the list, with some proposing the removal of all species due to the perception of more “micro” and “single-species” management which may result from those designations. Additional recommendations for removal included Sage Grouse, Peregrine Falcon, Cutthroat Trout and *Astragalus isleyi*. In contrast, South Zone participants predominantly favored the process and sought the addition of species, especially American Pika and *Astragalus Isleyi* in the La Sal Mountains, Greenback Cutthroat Trout, Bighorn Sheep, Black footed Ferret, Sage Grouse and Wild Horses.

Respondents also expressed concern over the data requirements for adding species to the list, specifically the stipulation requiring the existence of data to prove a species is present in the Forest area and is under stress. Some said this was an unfair threshold, arguing that the absence of information did not mean the species was not at risk.

Wilderness Inventory

Draft Wilderness Inventory maps provided to the public for review illustrated areas excluded from consideration due to size, substantially noticeable improvements or roads and highlighted areas which have seen significant vegetation management activities within the last 20 years, existing wilderness, roads and trails. Participants were asked 4 questions including: are there areas smaller than 5,000 acres that you think should be considered for recommendation as wilderness, are there any corrections that need to be made to the initial draft maps, which potential wilderness areas identified should be carried over to the evaluation phase, and which should not? The Wilderness Inventory process is described in Appendix 4.

Coal Unsuitability

While participants were provided a handout explaining the Coal Evaluation process and given the opportunity to discuss coal resources with Forest staff, no comments were received from the public. The coal unsuitability process is described in Appendix 4.

Conclusion

The uses of the Manti-La Sal National Forest, and the visions of its future, are as varied as the Forest's geographic landscapes themselves. This presents a challenge for Plan Revision in that user groups and varying uses are often polarized on the appropriate management action or purpose. However, such diversity of thought also presents an enormous opportunity for the Forest and its users to create a dynamic Forest Plan that provides for multiple uses and meets a variety of needs for the surrounding communities.

While public comments were divided on topics such as climate change, fire, grazing, Wilderness, providing conflicting observations, trends and management suggestions, there were a few notable areas of concurrence, such as a general appreciation for the social and economic importance of the Forest (Figure 3). While there are many disagreements on how the Forest should be managed, there was a general sentiment that the ultimate goal of that management should be conserving the Forest for use and enjoyment by current and future generations.

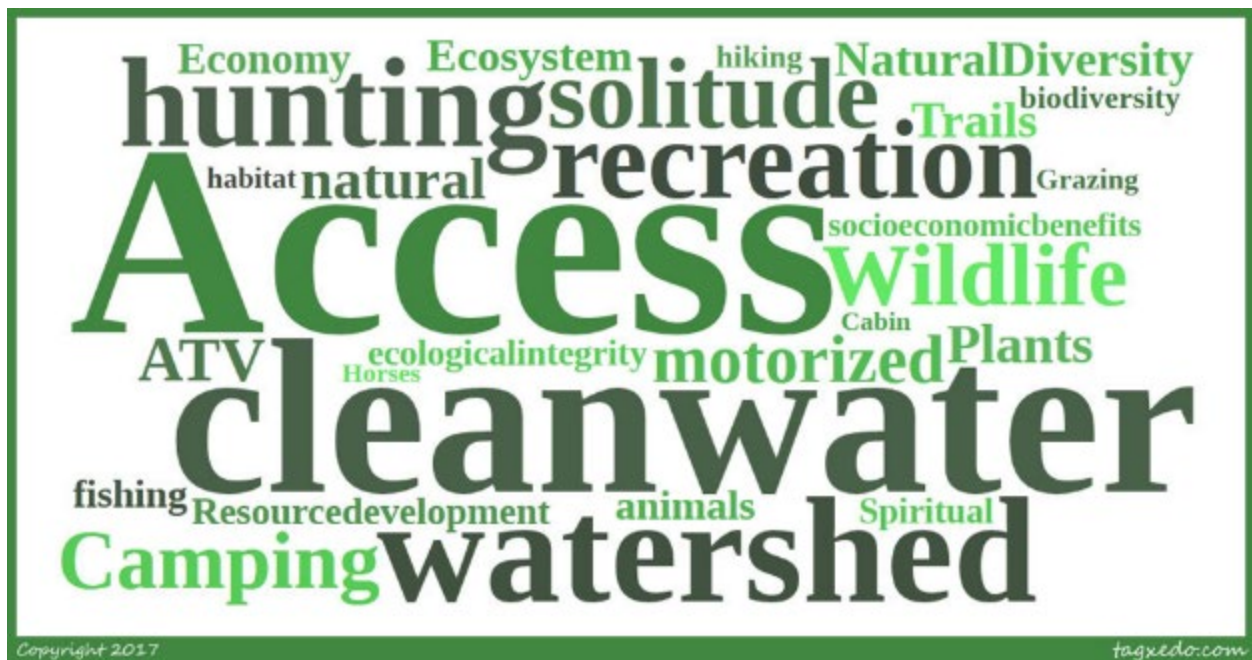


Figure 3. Public values of the Forest as expressed at the workshops.