

Forest Plan Revision Timber FAQs

There are several requirements for the timber program when creating or revising a national forest plan. One is the identification of lands suitable and not suitable for timber production and another is a projection of future timber harvest volume. The Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) National Forests currently propose three different draft alternatives to the current plan. Each of these action alternatives would involve an increase in the lands suitable for timber production, and timber volume would vary – both higher and lower than the projection under the current forest plan.

Draft plan alternatives

Topic	No Action	Draft Alt B	Draft Alt C	Draft Alt D
Lands Suitable for Timber Production Acres	468,400	948,200	974,900	757,800
Annual Volume CCF	35,900 CCF for the first 5 years. For years 6 through 20, 32,100 CCF.	55,000	Same as B	30,000

Why does timber have a suitability decision? No other resources seem to have this.

- The 2012 planning rule implements the National Forest Management Act and is used to write a forest plan. Both require the identification of lands suitable for timber production and the 2012 planning rule directs this process.
- Aside from coal suitability decisions required for forests with coal production, timber suitability is the only required suitability decision.
- Other resources are mapped and allocated, such as recreation and scenery, even though they are not specifically allocated as “suitable”.

Does the increase in lands suitable for timber production mean that other resources “lose” those corresponding acres?

- Lands suitable for timber production do not exclude other uses or resources. It does not mean that the area’s primary purpose is timber production. Production areas remain valuable wildlife habitat, popular recreation destinations, healthy watersheds

and more.

Why do the acres of lands suitable for timber production increase between the former plan (1991) and the draft alternatives?

- The primary reason for the increase in acreage is the current policy does not require the exclusion of areas that may be uneconomical to harvest.



Log loader working on a timber sale. USDA Forest Service photo by Bob Wick

- Some of the area proposed as suitable for timber production likely will not be viable for commercial harvest, whether due to distance from existing roads, steep slopes, smaller diameter trees or dead stands. The economics and site particulars need to come together to make a viable and sustainable commercial timber sale. But we are unable to project where those will and won’t align, so the current approach is inclusive.
- Each future timber sale is analyzed in subsequent NEPA, and subject to public review.
- Commercial timber harvest is also allowed **outside** of lands suitable for timber production. Timber harvest in these cases may be for fuel reduction risk, wildlife habitat improvement, safety, salvage, disease or insect sanitation, or other reasons.

What is the difference between lands suitable for timber production and lands suitable for timber harvest?

The following chart compares these two terms. The main difference is how replanting occurs, and what the primary purpose of the harvest should be.

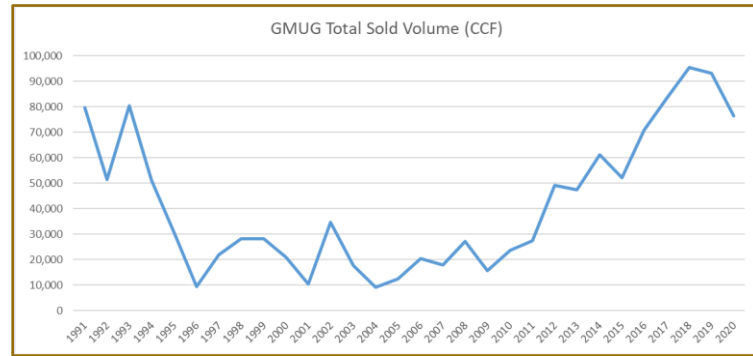
	Suitable for Production	Suitable for Harvest
Commercial harvest allowed	Yes	Yes
Temporary road construction allowed	Yes	Yes, with the exception of Colorado Roadless Areas
Replanting/reforestation requirements	Yes	Yes
Purpose of harvest	Can be primarily for purpose of timber production* and most often has other benefiting purposes (wildfire risk reduction, wildlife habitat, etc.)	Must be primarily for other purposes: wildfire risk reduction, wildlife habitat improvement, safety, salvage, sanitation
Managed for other uses (recreation, range, wildlife)	Yes	Yes

*Limited by regulation, as written into the draft plan: FW-STND-TMBR-05: Silvicultural systems shall be selected to achieve desired conditions and objectives or to meet site-specific project needs, not primarily for the greatest dollar return or timber output (36 CFR 219.11(d)(5)).

Why does timber volume seem to be increasing in the draft forest plan?

- Current production is 60,000 CCF annually. The draft plan proposes as much as 55,000 CCF annually, so the plan would not increase production.
- Timber production on the GMUG has been higher the last few years, reaching over 90,000 CCF per year in 2018 and 2019. We've salvage-harvested more due to the spruce-beetle epidemic and lodgepole pine mortality. Timber production in 2020 was 75,000 CCF, and is anticipated to be 60,000 CCF in 2021.
- Harvest is expected to drop over time to approximately 30,000 CCF to 55,000 CCF due to the decline in salvage harvest.
- Because of the emphasis in alternatives B and C to do active vegetation management and more fuels reduction, those alternatives used the higher projection of 55,000 CCF. The other alternatives

suggest approximately 30,000 CCF to showcase the lower end of the range in what we might produce.



Would every acre of suitable timber be harvested?

- Given the limits noted above, as well as resource concerns, not every acre would be appropriate or economical to harvest. We can best determine that at the project level with more detailed information.

Just as a hypothetical, at current rates, it would take approximately 180 years to harvest the full extent. This plan is only for the next 15 years; a reasonable estimate is roughly 8% of suitable lands would be harvested in that time.

Why does the forest plan focus so much on timber? Aren't other resources important?

- The forest plan addresses the varied resources, ecosystem services and multiple uses across our landscape. Recreation management was one of the primary drivers of the plan development and mapping of alternatives, and more plan direction is devoted to this than any other resource. Wildlife is a close second in terms of sheer amount of direction.
- While timber direction is integral to forest management, so is direction for all other resources that contribute to our forests' ecological integrity and to our communities' economies.

The GMUG planning team has sought to provide a range of alternatives consistent with public and cooperating agency feedback received over the past four years. We invite the public to review the draft plan and provide comments. The current public comment period began Aug. 13 and will close Nov. 12. Comments may be submitted at

http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/gmug/forestplan_comments

For more information, visit

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/DraftForestPlan> or contact the planning team at SM.FS.gmugplanning@usda.gov.