Flathead National Forest Plan

Social Environment Monitoring Guide and Evaluation of Results (MON-S&E)

Point of Contact:

Conservation education program manager: Teresa Wenum

Introduction

This document provides the instructions and information needed to address the forest plan monitoring items associated with social resources, and specifically with conservation education and connecting people to nature. Recognizing that multiple people may be involved in the forest plan monitoring task, monitoring items have been grouped into separate documents based on the main resource area and primary contact person. The monitoring items included in this document are listed below:

Monitoring Item and Question (Chapter 5 of Flathead Forest Plan)
MON-S&E-03: To what extent are there opportunities for all people, including youth, to connect with the Forest through conservation education, interpretive and visitor information programs across the Forest?

Purpose and Outline of this Document

Each individual monitoring item in the Forest Plan monitoring program (Chapter 5 of the Plan) has been addressed in a document such as this one, which is intended to serve as the primary location for information needed to conduct the monitoring and to record the results. It is designed to aid in the tracking and preservation of monitoring methods, data and results over the life of the plan. It is anticipated that these documents would be revisited and used as a guide to conduct the monitoring for each biennial reporting; to see past results and record new results; and updated where needed based on recommendations for change in the previous biennial report.

This document is **NOT** the final Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report (MER), but it should contain most if not all the information needed to prepare that report, and functions as project record material for the biennial MER.

Each monitoring item in this document is organized into five main sections:

- **Introduction:** Key information from the monitoring plan (i.e. indicators, plan component being monitored, data source/collection)
- **Methods**: Detailed information on how the monitoring will be accomplished, the intent of the selected indicators, data sources and confidence levels, etc.
- **Results:** Summary of the monitoring data used and the results for the current biennial monitoring report.
- **Discussion of Results**: A fact-based discussion of results. A list of general questions (see below) and in some cases more specific resource-based questions are provided to help guide this discussion

- **Evaluation of Results for Adaptive Management Finding:** evaluation of what the results mean in terms of management decisions. This information is incorporated into the Biennial Monitoring Evaluation Report.

SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT MONITORING (MON-S&E)

MON-S&E-03. To what extent are there opportunities for all people, including youth, to connect with the Forest through conservation education, interpretive and visitor information programs across the Forest?

Introduction

Desired conditions in the Research and Education section of the Forest Plan (FW-DC-R&E-01 through 05) emphasize the importance of providing opportunities to enrich visitors' experience and understanding of the Forest's natural and cultural resources. These include providing conservation education, interpretive, and visitor information programs that connect people to the forest environment and foster a sense of place and stewardship. It is desired to have focused education activities that engage youth in hands-on outdoor experiences and support educators teaching science and natural resource topics. It is also desired to use a diversity of program delivery methods and media to engage and help maintain program relevancy for different audiences. Desired conditions in the Partnerships and Coordination section (FW-DC-P&C 14) stress cooperative partnerships with other national, state, and local agencies, tribal agencies, schools, and nongovernmental organizations to support quality education programs forest-wide.

The forest plan components that are monitored under this item are as follows:

FW-DC-S&E-03: Opportunities connect people, including youth, with the natural and cultural resources across the Forest through recreation and/or employment opportunities.

FW-DC-R&E-01: Interpretation and education opportunities enrich visitors' experience and understanding of the Forest by providing, for example, information on wildlife-human conflicts and aquatic and terrestrial invasive species.

FW-DC-R&E-02: Conservation education, interpretive, and visitor information programs provide opportunities for visitors, youth, and communities to appreciate and understand the Forest's natural and cultural resources and learn how to conserve those resources for future generations.

FW-DC-R&E-03: Education, interpretive, and information programs and activities connect people to the Forest environment and foster a sense of place and stewardship.

FW-DC-R&E-04: Focused education activities engage youth in hands-on outdoor experiences and support educators teaching science and natural resource topics.

FW-DC-R&E-05: Diverse methods and media are used for program delivery, including making best use of new technologies such as social media, Web/Internet presence, self-guided media using smartphones, and other devices to help maintain relevancy for the audience.

Table 1. MON-S&E-03 plan components, indicators, data source, frequency and responsible person

Plan Component(s)	Indicator	Data Source / Partner	Data collection interval	Point of Contact
FW-DC-S&E-03	**IND-S&E-04.** Number and type of	WO Naturewatch, Interpretation and Conservation Education (NICE) database	Annual	Conservation Education

Plan Component(s)	Indicator	Data Source / Partner	Data collection interval	Point of Contact
FW-DC-R&E-01 through 05	education, interpretative, visitor info programs. **05.** Number of people including youth, participating (reached?) in Forest education, interpretive and visitor info programs.	https://apps.fs.usda.gov/nice/f/welcome		Program manager

Methods

Annually the Conservation Education Program Manager collects and reports on forest-wide conservation education, interpretation, and visitor information program accomplishments. Accomplishments are gathered from ranger districts and individual program areas including Fire and Fuels, Wildlife, Heritage, Botany, Recreation & Wilderness, Timber/Vegetation Management, Watershed and Fisheries.

The information collected follows what is reported annually in the Forest Service national NatureWatch, Interpretation, Conservation Education (NICE) database. NICE is the Forest Service database of record for reporting outreach and education activities and sharing accomplishments with the public, partners, and leadership. And according to the NICE program, for the purposes of reporting, an accomplishment is defined as an educational program, experience and/or activity that enables people to understand and appreciate natural resources and learn how to conserve them for future generations. The NICE database collects and reports on audience demographics, program topics, delivery methods, program location, estimated program budget, program evaluation, and involved partners.

- **IND-S&E- 04.** Number and type of education, interpretative, visitor info programs. Review the NICE report summary for total number of programs accomplished and nature of programs being presented. This is a good measure of the available opportunity for people to engage in programs that connect them with the Forest and if using a diversity of methods to reach different audiences. The effects of events such as wildfire restrictions or closures, weather impacts (e.g. cold, extreme wind) to outdoor programming and other safety related events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, would be reflected in this indicator. Programming unique to a specific year such as the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act or Smokey Bear's 75th Birthday would also be reflected in this indicator. These types of events may drive programming to more specific subject matter and program type and increase or decrease the number of total programs.

- **IND-S&E- 05.** Number of people including youth, participating in Forest education, interpretive and visitor info programs. Review the NICE report summary for audience totals -- total number of all people participating and total number of youth participating in programs. This is a good overall measure of the total number of people participating in outreach programs. The effects of events such as wildfire restrictions or closures and weather impacts (e.g. cold, extreme wind) to

outdoor programming, and other safety related events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, would be reflected in this indicator. Programming unique to a specific year such as the 50th Anniversary of the Wilderness Act or Smokey Bear's 75th Birthday, would also be reflected in this indicator with a potential increase in audience numbers.

Results

Table 2: Monitoring results for MON-S&E-03. Opportunities to connect people, including youth, to the Forest through Conservation Education, Interpretation and Visitor Info programs.

	Monitoring date and data results		
Indicator	**2019**	**2020**	**2021**

IND-S&E-04. Number and type of education, interpretative, visitor info programs	• 25 NICE Entries[1]
	• Top three delivery methods:
	  Presentations/Demos (80%)
	  Hands-on Activity (24%)
	  Staff table/exhibit (20%)
		• 14 NICE Entries*
		• Top three delivery methods:
		  Presentations/Demos (57%)
		  Hands-on activity (28%)
		  Staff table/exhibit (14%)
		  Training (14%)
		  Multi-media (14%)
			Final year totals available after Oct. 15

IND-S&E-05 Number of people including youth, participating in Forest education, interpretive and visitor info programs.	• 21,212 Total number of people participating (reached?) in programs. • 3,334 Participating youth	• 50,250 Total number of people participating (reached?) in programs. • 1,490 Participating youth	Final year totals available after Oct. 15

[1] Flathead National Forest NICE accomplishment entries are often entered according to subject or large program area categories, such as the Family Forestry Expo, a once a year event that includes five days of multiple hands-on presentations over a five day period for 5th graders and several informal talks, demos and hands-on activities for families on a Saturday. Instead of listing each individual presentation and activity as one entry, the event is listed and described as one entry, reaching over 2000 students and families. Another example of this type of entry is the Summit Nature Center partnership project with winter and summer programming that includes multiple activities, events, and presentations.

Discussion of Results

- *Why the noticeable differences in the 2019 and 2020 number of programs and people reached?*

Seven months of the 2020 program year were within the COVID-19 pandemic period. Spring and many summer community events that the Forest traditionally participated, were cancelled, including Earth Day and Arbor Day and the Family Forestry Expo. With schools closed, traditional annual classroom visits did not take place and for safety concerns the Forest did not participate in the annual NW Montana Fair. Other Forest programs were postponed to 2021 including the Artist-Wilderness-Connection, artist-in-resident program. The Summit Nature Center project continued though at a reduced capacity, moving operations outdoors for the summer.

The larger number of people reached in 2020 reflects the reporting of 21 fire safety/prevention educational posts on the Flathead National Forest Facebook page with an audience reach of 40,000.

2020 was the first year for recording specific social media educational posts as part of the Forest's outreach efforts. Previous year's recorded accomplishments focused on traditional outreach methods, in-person programs, and limited reporting of print media, publications (e.g. news and magazine articles,

brochures), static media such as signing and curriculum materials. This last year, the NICE database expanded non-personal delivery categories to better account for electronic media.

- *How many years has the Forest collected and reported information into the NICE database and are there general trends?*

Flathead National Forest has collected and reported information into the NICE database since 2008. Over an eleven-year period from 2008 to 2018, the estimated annual average for total number of people participating in programs is 22,900 and for youth 3,350 (10-year average – data not reported for 2014).

The average annual number of NICE entries for this same period is 17 – in 2008 all forest-wide programming except for the More Kids in the Woods partnership program with the Glacier Institute, was included under one entry; 2009 was a similar situation with only six recorded entries, and in 2014 there were three entries due to incomplete reporting.

Reviewing program delivery methods, Presentations/Demonstrations is the highest recorded method through all years, followed by Staff Table/Exhibit and Hands-on Activity. To note, through time the list of Delivery Methods categories has grown, becoming more specific and adding new methods such as electronic media, to reflect current outreach trends.

Through time as the NICE program has improved so has forest-wide data collection and reporting.

To look strictly at total audience numbers is limiting as it does not factor in the difference between delivery methods, audience numbers, and the unique quality of the learning experience. For example, a day-long professional development training for 20 teachers, is different than staffing a table at a community Earth Day event reaching over 100 people.

Looking at the indicator measures, the Forest has provided consistent opportunities for all people including youth to connect with the Forest through conservation education, interpretive and visitor information programs.

- *Do any other USFS management activities effect or influence monitoring results?*

Through the last 13 years of reporting, certain reporting years have been influenced by the availability of Washington or Regional Office funding for specific conservation education partnership projects. Those projects often increase the total number of people, particularly youth, participating in education programming – for example, the national More Kids in the Woods initiative and associated funding supported several years of summer youth programming with the Glacier Institute out of the Big Creek Outdoor Education Center.

Evaluation of Results for Adaptive Management Finding

The following findings and recommendations resulted from the evaluation of monitoring results as documented above.

Table 3. Summary of Findings for Monitoring Item MON-S&E-03

1. **Plan Monitoring Results**: Does the monitoring question and indicator(s) provide the information necessary to understand the status of the associated plan component listed above?
YES with wording modifications of question and indicators
Recommendations – Change wording in monitoring question and indicators to better reflect what is being measured.   Change the MON-S&E-03 Monitoring question **FROM**: "To what extent do opportunities to connect people, including youth, with nature exist across the Forest?" **TO** "To what extent are there opportunities for all people, including youth, to connect with the Forest through conservation education, interpretive and visitor information programs across the Forest?"   Change indicator IND-S&E-04 **FROM**: "Number and type of education and youth programs; national visitor use monitoring report IND-REC-01; visitor center tracking" **TO** "Number and type of education, interpretative, visitor info programs."   Change indicator IND-S&E-05 **FROM:** "Number of youth participating in various Forest education and youth programs" **TO** "Number of people, including youth, participating in Forest education, interpretive and visitor info programs."
2. **Plan Implementation Status [1]**: Do monitoring results demonstrate progress of the associated plan components for with this monitoring item?
Yes (E) Implementation of Plan Component(s) ARE trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired
Recommendation – If monitoring question and indicators are changed to reflect available opportunities forest-wide to participate in education and outreach programs.
3. **Type of change under consideration [2]:** If corrective action/change was indicated under either #1 or #2, <u>where</u> might that change might be needed?
Forest Plan Monitoring program - Change in MON-S&E-03 Monitoring question, plan components and indicators.   May also consider an additional indicator that focuses on education programs that are supported by cooperative partnerships with other agencies or private entities.

[1] **PLAN IMPLEMENTATION STATUS: (A) Uncertain -** Availability of data or Interval of data collection beyond this reporting cycle (*indicate date of next time this monitoring item will be evaluated*); **(B) Uncertain -** More time/data are needed to understand status or progress of the plan component(s)**; (C) Uncertain -** Methods inadequate to assess the status or progress toward achieving plan component(s) (**D) NO** - Implementation of plan component(s) ARE NOT trending, progressing, and/or conducted as desired**; (E)**
[2] **CHOICES for <u>where</u> change may be needed include**: Monitoring program, plan component, management activity, plan assessment, program strategy or approaches documents, public engagement strategy