



Minimum Requirement Decision Guide (MRDG) Process

4/2013

Step 1:

Discuss and describe the situation with resource staffs and line officers to determine if the project is **necessary** and is a current priority. The first question is: is this truly an emergency? The next question is “can the project be accomplished outside of wilderness?” “ If not an emergency can it be done safely without motorized use? Is this a situation that involves saving a life or property such as fire suppression or search and rescue? Who has the authority to make this decision?

Step 2:

If not an immediate emergency, this project may involve other partners such as state and federal agencies. This initial conversation about the project should involve district, forest and the region to determine if this action is necessary. Explore and investigate all options outside of wilderness to address the situation.

Determine the necessity to meet other criteria such as valid existing rights, special provisions of wilderness legislation, requirements of other legislation and wilderness character. Take time to do your homework on a project.

If the action is necessary in Wilderness, make sure you understand Forest Service policy and regional supplement. Read the forest plan direction, wilderness plan, recovery or fire plan. Is there a programmatic agreement, MOU or guidance document such as AFWA.

Consider tribal relations and political climate. Is there supplemental information that would be helpful for decision maker? Is there a map or history of past projects? Prepare your line officers to support a well thought out recommendation.

Step 3:

Develop your action and alternatives. This should help develop a proposed action for NEPA. Level of NEPA is at your line officer’s discretion. Plan ahead a minimum of three months to give each level of agency adequate time to develop MRDG, NEPA and implement the project. If it requires an EA or EIS more time is needed. A CE takes 90 days now for NOI and scoping.

Determine delegation of authority in advance to assure proper program managers and level of agency is aware of project. Time needs to be allocated to schedule and brief decision maker. If it is a regional forester decision then notify the Regional Wilderness Program Manager and their resource counterpart.



Step 4:

At first notification from a Forest of a project, regional program manager will discuss with other regional resources. A DRAFT MRDG can be prepared and sent to the Regional program manager who will coordinate with other resource managers. Wilderness staff will flag any concerns that need further verification. More than two alternatives need to be listed to go through an adequate array of alternatives. Coordinate large scale projects across Forest boundaries, consider programmatic NEPA, keep staff trained and consider other regions.

Step 5:

If concerns, the WPM will call the Forest and speak directly to the Rec. Staff officer/Program Manager/Line Officers to verify his/her support for the request. More information such as photos or maps may be requested. Other alternatives may be discussed. If there are inconsistencies with law or policy, the WPM may call the WO or other Regions to determine national consistency or share ideas on similar situations. Logistics and coordination may include development of timelines, closures, budget, NEPA. On the ground oversight may include wilderness resource advisors, biologist, other agency or contactor.

Step 6:

WPM will get back to the Forest and request a final version of a MRDG, briefing paper and a formal letter making a recommendation to the regional forester for a decision. The NEPA, Forest plan and other guidance can be indicated in the letter. These documents are sent in the official Correspondence database including a scanned MRDG with signatures. The signature block should include the person who prepared the MRDG, Resource Staff Officer, District Ranger and Forest Supervisor. Include signature spaces for resource Directors and the Regional Forester. Send a final edited version.

Step 7:

The Forest should allow at least one month for the Region to respond. A briefing will be scheduled with the Regional Forester and Directors. The WPM will explain the project and highlight any concerns and recommend denial or approval. If the Regional Forester has more questions or concerns, there may be a delay in the final decision. If the RF approves the project, a signed MRDG will be scanned and attached to a formal letter including mitigations or clarifications. If denied the WPM will call the Forest and send a letter stating the rationale. The WPM will work with the Forest to find an alternative way to accomplish the work.

Step 10:

Final RF letter is submitted for signature and sent in the official database. A hard copy is stored in the Regional office. An electronic copy may also be sent to partner agencies. There may be a staff group or specific individual identified to oversee the project.

Step 11:

Follow up on project including monitoring, after action reviews, costs, tracking of motorized/mechanized equipment and numbers such as sling loads, days with chainsaws, etc. Put in Wilderness INFRA



Reference:

MRDG Process outline and MRDG worksheets can be found at the Arthur Carhart National Wilderness Training Center at wilderness.net

Forest Service Manual (FSM) 2326.04c authorizes the Forest Supervisor to approve the use of motorized equipment and mechanical transport in wilderness for “Emergencies where the situation involves an inescapable urgency and temporary need for speed beyond that available by primitive means. Categories include fire suppression, health and safety, law enforcement involving serious crime or fugitive pursuit, removal of deceased persons, and aircraft accident investigations.” Region 3 Supplement, FSM 2304.3, Exhibit 01 allows this authority to be re-delegated to District Rangers. Although this authority is further delegable in writing to District Rangers, delegation is to be limited only to those Rangers who have attended national or regional wilderness stewardship training. In any case, the authority is not delegable beyond the line officer level, except to a designated Acting Forest Supervisor or Acting District Ranger. Only the Regional Forester has the authority to approve tractor use for fire suppression and prescribed burns in wilderness.

Search and Rescue operations in wilderness are conducted by the County Sheriff in AZ or State Police in NM in cooperation with the Forest or District under an approved S&R Plan. Motorized use for emergency is authorized by the Forest Supervisor or Acting and can be re delegated to District Rangers. Verbal approve is accepted with follow-up documentation of approval granted during the emergency.