



Gila National Forest

Forest Plan Revision

Public Participation Strategy

May 8, 2015

Purpose

The Gila National Forest is currently revising the 1986 Forest Plan. This public participation strategy is intended to provide a framework for communication, contribution and collaboration among all parties involved, or desiring involvement in the Gila National Forest Plan Revision (FPR). Engaging internal and external audiences throughout the multi-phase, multi-year process will be essential to the success of the revised forest plan. This is a living document that is anticipated to evolve based on input and feedback from all parties throughout the process.

Goals

- Establish and maintain open communication channels with internal and external audiences.
- Increase awareness, allow for shared learning and promote a common understanding of the importance of the planning process and the forest plan.
- Keep all concerned parties informed throughout the process.
- Provide opportunities to exchange data and information.
- Create a broad; clear decision-making process that improves the FPR process.
- Promote constructive open dialogue, debate and deliberation among different perspectives.
- Encourage input and feedback throughout all phases of the planning process.
- Build and maintain effective working relationships to help improve the problem solving process.
- Use proactive methods and tools to meet the expectations and information needs of interested parties.

- Communicate key messages regarding FPR and the resulting document that will guide management decisions on the Gila National Forest for the next 15 years.

Background

The Forest Plan is a comprehensive document that guides forest resource management, use and protection. It aims to balance multiple uses and sustained yield of forest resources. It sets forth a vision for land management, describes the desired conditions within the forest, and lays out specific objectives, standards and guidelines for how to achieve those desired conditions.

National U.S. Forest Service policy requires plans be revised periodically. The Forest Service's [2012 Planning Rule](#) directs Forest Plans to be science-based and developed with extensive public involvement and collaboration. The current [Gila Forest Plan](#) was last revised in 1986, and has been amended eleven times, the most recently in 2006. Many changes have occurred since then environmentally, socially and economically. This FPR process will confirm what is working with the 1986 plan and identify where there is a need for change.

This multi-year process involves three phases; assessment, revision and monitoring.

Phase 1. The Assessment

The assessment will look at conditions and opportunities on the National Forest within the context of the broader landscape by identifying and evaluating relevant existing information from a variety of sources. Biodiversity; soils; watershed and wildlife habitat conditions; natural functions and processes on the land; areas of tribal importance; multiple uses and their economic contributions; and recreation are just some of items that will be evaluated during this initial phase. Public engagement in this phase will provide opportunities to share data and knowledge of existing forest conditions and identify trends and perceptions of risks to social, economic and ecological systems. Public engagement will be particularly important in developing the potential list of species of conservation concern, determining geographic extent of the plan area's influence on social and economic conditions, and informing potential special designation (e.g. wilderness, wild and scenic river) inventories. This phase will take about a year to complete. The results of the assessment will help identify what "needs to change" from the current forest plan.

Phase II. Plan Revision and NEPA

The goal of the plan revision phase is to decide which parts of the forest plan will be updated, and to develop and adopt recommendations. The revision process includes the development of plan components (desired conditions, objectives, standards and guidelines) which reflect different management scenarios, known as "alternatives". Development of a monitoring program with stakeholder involvement will also be part of the revision process. Environmental analysis will be completed on all alternatives following the process required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Public involvement during this phase of the revision process will be focused on developing areas of agreement relevant to plan components, designing those components, and ensuring the use of best available scientific information in plan development. The "decision space" or ability to influence the process for particular topics will be further defined as the FPR progresses. In addition, the NEPA process will provide opportunities to comment on the draft plan and accompanying analysis documents. An objection period will occur before the approval of the final plan and record of decision.

Phase III. Implementation and Monitoring

After the revised forest plan is adopted, the forest plan and monitoring program will be implemented. Monitoring provides feedback by tracking relevant changes over time, testing

assumptions underlying management decisions, and measuring the effectiveness of management activity in achieving desired outcomes. The Planning Rule requires a monitoring report every two years after adoption of a new forest plan.

Guiding Principles for Participation and Collaboration

Public participation activities are integral parts of the plan revision process. The Gila National Forest is committed to working with all interested parties to build a forest plan that is developed collaboratively and supported broadly. Such a plan will reflect input from stakeholders and incorporate local knowledge and experience, and conform to current law, regulation and policy.

Based on input received during the March 2015 Community Conversation series, a set of collaborative principles and expectations were outlined.

Collaborative principles for all parties:

- Be respectful, objective, constructive and on topic
- Listen to and be respectful of divergent viewpoints
- Identify and focus on common ground
- Learn from the past but focus on the future; check your assumptions about others
- Appreciate diverse educational backgrounds and experience
- Share knowledge, data and information
- Be willing to learn from one another
- Value each other's time
- Take responsibility for your role and commit to the process
- Encourage the younger generation and minorities to participate

Expectations for the Forest Service:

- Rely on, value and incorporate local knowledge; recognize the importance of the forest resources to adjacent communities
- Be inclusive of all stakeholder groups and incorporate diverse perspectives
- Communicate consistently, frequently, in a timely manner and in plain language
- Explain where in the process there are opportunities to be engaged
- Provide all relevant information regarding collaborative work with other entities
- Be transparent; if change is necessary, provide an explanation
- Use the best available science and communicate clearly about its origins, advantages, limitations and application in all phases of the process
- Utilize common sense
- Define the "decision space" and the scope of influence stakeholders might have for elements of the revision
- Clarify constraints imposed by law, regulation and policy; differentiate between them and demonstrate compliance with all
- Demonstrate progress through the planning process; follow through and follow up
- Inform stakeholders how input will be used
- Demonstrate expertise, professionalism and accountability during meetings and in documents
- Utilize various ways of reaching stakeholders; include face to face local meetings, online formats and local publications

- Use professional facilitators where possible
- Provide timely feedback

Expectations for the Community Stakeholders:

- Stakeholders actively participate in process and contribute

Public Participation Process Agreements

This section describes the principles and best practices that the Forest may use in FPR:

- All public planning meetings are open to the public.
- All public planning meeting materials and notes will be made available on the Gila National Forest website (<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gila/home/?cid=STELPRD3828671>). Hard copies will also be provided for public meetings.
- Public meeting agendas may be posted to the website at least one week in advance.
- Participating in public planning meetings does not limit anyone's activity during the NEPA process. Individuals who contribute during collaborative planning workshops may participate in the NEPA process, including submitting formal comments or submitting objections.
- The Gila National Forest will seek information from individuals and organizations. However, per restrictions on the use of federal advisory boards, the Forest Service cannot ask a group, as a whole, whether consensus exists. The Gila NF will encourage self-convened workgroups around resource topic areas that will inform collaborative work sessions.

Who is Involved in Forest Plan Revision

All members of the public who share an interest in the future of land and resource management on the Gila are encouraged to participate in FPR. Inclusion of diverse perspectives, knowledge, skills, roles, jurisdictions, supports the development of a comprehensive plan. The Forest seeks to continue working with partners and neighbors toward improving forest health and resiliency, supporting jobs and providing multiple uses and ecosystem services.

The Gila National Forest counts among its plan revision stakeholders:

- Agency partners – federal, state, county, local
- Businesses and chambers
- Clubs and community groups
- Community members
- Civil Rights organizations
- Educators, students (college, high school, secondary, elementary)
- Elected officials – national, regional, local
- Environmental and conservation organizations
- Federally recognized Indian Tribes
- Fire safety and community protection groups
- Forest Service employees and retirees
- Interested Individuals (local, regional, national)
- Local government
- Low-income populations
- Media
- Minority populations
- Private landowners

- Permittees
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts/Natural Resource Conservation Districts
- University Cooperative Extension, Researchers
- Volunteer and stewardship groups
- Youth and youth-related organizations

It is a goal of the planning process to identify common objectives with Tribal, state, and local governments, and find opportunities to resolve or reduce conflicts. The IDT will review the planning and land use policies of other public agencies to understand and give consideration to their objectives. The Gila NF will consider ways the revised Forest Plan could contribute to compatibility between the National Forest and other agency plans. Requests for cooperating agency status are encouraged from eligible state, local and Tribal governments, but are applicable only during the NEPA process for the plan revision phase and will be considered at that time. Meetings will be conducted with government agencies to discuss issues, concerns, and management plans.

The 2012 Rule specifically identified that forests seek out and engage low-income, youth, and minority populations. To engage low-income populations in FPR, the Forest will identify non-profits and social services organizations that provide support to low-income populations to suggest possible approaches and opportunities. To engage youth in FPR, the Forest will use web/social media and identify and participate with youth organizations which have natural affinities to the National Forest such as: Youth Conservation Corps, Gila Conservation Education Center, Boy & Girl Scouts, 4H, and Future Farmers of America. The Forest will also contact science and natural resources teachers at the elementary, secondary, high school, and university levels to discuss opportunities to include FPR in their lessons. To engage minority populations in FPR, the Forest will identify and work with community leaders to suggest possible approaches/opportunities and gathering places to hold listening sessions, dialogue and discussions about use and management of the Forest. Bilingual versions of FPR materials/handouts could be produced.

Methods

Information needs and public involvement levels may change throughout the FPR process. Public input, feedback, and collaboration are some of the effective ways members of the public can participate. It is important that the Forest ask interested individuals how they want to be informed and be involved in various activities. The Gila NF will use the following techniques and approaches to engage stakeholders.

1. The Forest Plan Revision website is the main repository for updates, notices, background materials and links to other references
<http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/gila/home/?cid=STELPRD3828671>
2. News Releases will be sent out when new steps are taken in the FPR process. These are sent to a wide audience and media for further distribution.
3. Legal notices will be published in the newspaper of record, which is the Silver City Daily Press. Legal notices may also be published in The Herald in Truth or Consequences.
4. Notices will be published in the Federal Register as required by the 2012 Planning Rule Final Directives.
5. Facebook will be used to post notices, updates, invitations, and photos.
<https://www.facebook.com/GilaNForest>
6. Another social media method we will use is Twitter to send brief updates and links to additional information. <https://twitter.com/gilanforest>
7. The email address for Forest Plan Revision is gilaplan@fs.fed.us

8. An email distribution list will be maintained specifically for FPR to send out information on updates, notices, invitations to provide comments, and other opportunities for public participation. Please email gilaplan@fs.fed.us to request to be added to the list.
9. Presentations can be made by the FPR team for organizations and other entities upon request. Presentation materials are also posted on the FPR web page.
10. Materials such as Frequently Asked Questions, newsletters, information sheets, and handouts will be distributed at events and posted to the website.
11. Phone calls will be made by district personnel to local community members when appropriate.
12. Flyers will be posted in communities to announce upcoming events.
13. Staff will attend large events in the local communities at a Gila National Forest booth to provide information on Forest Plan Revision.
14. Public meetings, open houses, and workshops will be hosted in surrounding communities throughout the process.
15. Send mail to Gila National Forest Plan Revision, 3005 E. Camino del Bosque, Silver City, NM 88061-7683
16. A suggestion from the Collaboration Cadre was to form an informal sounding board from a broad spectrum of individuals/groups to provide input on how communities wish to be engaged in Forest Plan Revision. This idea will be explored further during the Forest Plan Revision process.

Forest Service Teams

Within the Forest Service, there are several teams that are involved in the plan revision process. In summary, from local to regional, the roles are as follows:

a. Gila NF Interdisciplinary Team (IDT)

- * *Forest Planner*: Manages, organizes and serves as the primary point of contact for the revision process
- * *Core Team*: Five member team (including the Forest Planner) 100% dedicated to the FPR effort and providing planning, social, economic, recreation, wildlife, vegetation, soil and water resource support.
- * *Extended Team*: 15-25 member team consisting of Gila NF, Regional Office staff and contractor support devoting a portion of their time to the revision effort in the areas of air, cultural resources, fire, GIS, infrastructure, lands/special uses, mineral/energy, range, recreation, scenery, silvicultural, social and economic resources, tribal resources, soils and water resources.

b. Forest Leadership Team (FLT)

* *Gila NF Supervisor*: Responsible official (decision-maker) for approval of plan revision
While the Agency is committed to public participation and encourages collaboration, the Forest Supervisor is the responsible official and is accountable for all formal land management planning decisions affecting NFS lands and may not relinquish that responsibility. The Forest Supervisor may consider the recommendations of collaborators, but is not obligated to follow the recommendations in making a decision.

- * *District Rangers (DRs)*: Liaisons to forest communities and constituents on plan revision issues
- * *Public Affairs Officer (PAO)*: Prepares communication materials in cooperation with the Core Team. Main point of contact for the media.
- * *Fire Management Officer*:
- * *Staff Officers*:

c. Regional Office (RO) Revision Team

- * Facilitates understanding of the 2012 Planning Rule.
- * Reviews all revision documents
- * Provides technical transfer and RO assistance in support of conducting ecologically and socioeconomic based assessments identified in the 2012 Rule.

d. Regional Leadership

- * *Regional Forester*: Reviewing officer for the objection process.

Action Plan Gila National Forest 2015

The Action Plan sets dates and identifies roles and responsibilities to reach and engage the greatest number of people.

Pre-Assessment				
Target Date	Activity/Action	Stakeholders	Responsible Party	Date Accomplished
Jan 2015	Collaborative Workshop	Gila & Lincoln NF IDT & FLT	Collaboration Cadre	Jan 2015
Feb 2015	Brief County Commissioners	Counties	District Rangers	Feb and March 2015
Feb 2015	Develop external web page	All	PAO	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Develop outreach materials	FS and non-FS	Core Team/FLT	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Schedule Community Conversations	All	Core Team/FLT	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Create SharePoint site for FPR	FS	PAO	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Outreach for Community Conversations	All	Districts, Extended & Core Team	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	News Release to introduce FPR	Media, General public	PAO	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Internal email to all employees	Gila NF employees	Forest Supervisor, PAO	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Communicate with tribal leaders	Tribes	District Rangers, Archaeologists	Feb 2015
Feb 2015	Utilize social media to expand outreach	FS and non-FS	PAO	Feb 2015
March 2015	Outreach for Community Conversations	All	Districts, Extended & Core Team	March 2015
March 2015	Conduct internal briefings at Districts/SO	Gila NF employees	Core Team	March 2015
March 2015	Hold Community Conversations	All	Forest-wide, Collaboration Cadre	March 9-12 2015
March 2015	Summarize Generation Wall input	All	Core Team	March 2015
March 2015	Summarize Community Conversation input	All	Contracted Facilitator	April 2015
March 2015	Web, Facebook, Twitter updates	FS and non-FS	PAO	March 2015
Mar/Apr 2015	Present at organization meetings	Organizations	Core Team	March and April 2015
Mar/Apr 2015	Present at local government meetings	Local government	District Rangers, Core Team	March and April 2015
April 2015	Post Community Conversation summaries	All	PAO	May 2015
May 2015	Distribute Public Participation Strategy	All Stakeholders	PAO, Core Team, FLT	May 2015
May 2015	Initiation of Assessment in Federal Register	All	Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
May 2015	Legal notice on initiation of assessment	All	Core Team	
May 2015	News Release on initiation of assessment	All	PAO	

Assessment Phase				
Target Date	Activity/Action	Stakeholders	Responsible Party	Date Accomplished
Ongoing	Meetings with Tribes	Tribal representatives	Archaeologists, District Rangers	
Ongoing	Present at local government meetings	Local government	District Rangers, Core Team	
Ongoing	Brief congressional representatives	Elected officials	PAO, Forest Supervisor	
Ongoing	Present at organization meetings	Organizations	Core Team	
Ongoing	Engage low-income populations	Low-income populations	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Engage youth populations	Youth	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Engage minority populations	Minority populations	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Conduct internal briefings at Districts/SO	Gila NF employees	Core Team	
May 2015	First meeting w/ Regional Office A-Team	Core and Extended Team	Regional Office Analysis Team	
May 2015	Conduct visits at Districts	Gila NF employees	Core Team	
May-Sep 2015	Call for existing, available data	Agencies, NGOs, public	Core Team	
May-Sep 2015	Meetings with agencies	Agencies	Core and Extended Team	
June 2015	Develop newsletter	All stakeholders	Core Team	
June 2015	Conduct visits at Districts/SO	Gila NF employees	Core Team	
Jun-Aug 2015	Public meetings on Assessment Phase	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Facilitator	
Jul-Sept 2015	Field trips: topics and locations TBD		IDT, FLT, Districts	
Sep-Nov 2015	Workshops on Assessment topics	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Facilitator	
March 2016	Draft Assessment Report for RO Review		Core Team, Extended Team	
May 2016	Assessment Report publicly available	All stakeholders	Core Team	
May 2016	Public meetings for Assessment Report	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Facilitator	

Plan Revision and NEPA Phase				
Target Date	Activity/Action	Stakeholders	Responsible Party	Date Accomplished
Ongoing	Meetings with Tribes	Tribal representatives	Archaeologists, District Rangers	
Ongoing	Present at local government meetings	Local government	District Rangers, Core Team	
Ongoing	Present at organization meetings	Organizations	Core Team	
Ongoing	Meetings with agencies	Agencies	Core and Extended Team	
Ongoing	Engage low-income populations	Low-income populations	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Engage youth populations	Youth	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Engage minority populations	Minority populations	Core Team, PAO, Districts	
Ongoing	Conduct internal briefings at Districts/SO	Gila NF employees	Core Team	
2016	Develop “need for change”	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	
2016	Notice of Intent to Revise Plan	All stakeholders	Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
2016	Develop desired conditions	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	

Plan Revision and NEPA Phase

Target Date	Activity/Action	Stakeholders	Responsible Party	Date Accomplished
2016	Build NEPA alternatives	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	
TBD	Topic: Species of conservation concern	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	
2016-2017	Develop plan components	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	
2016-2017	Develop monitoring plan	All stakeholders	Forest-wide, Interested stakeholders	
2017	Public Review of Draft plan and DEIS	All stakeholders	Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
2017-2018	Response to comments		Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
2018	Adjustments to plan and DEIS		Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
2018	Develop proposed final Forest Plan & EIS		Core Team, Forest Supervisor	
2018	Selection of preferred alternative		Forest Supervisor	
2018	Consultation w/ US Fish and Wildlife Service		Core and Extended Team Bios	
2018	Notice of Objection Period		Forest Supervisor	
2019	Approve Final Plan and EIS		Forest Supervisor	
2019	Record of Decision		Forest Supervisor	

Implementation and Monitoring Phase

Target Date	Activity/Action	Stakeholders	Responsible Party	Date Accomplished
2021	Biennial monitoring report publicly available		Planner	
2021	Public review of monitoring report		All stakeholders	

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