

U.S. Forest Service National Advisory Committee – Forest Planning Rule Implementation
April 28-30, 2015

USDA Forest Service, Office of International Programs,
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Introduction

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (the committee) held its third meeting of the new charter (eleventh meeting total) from April 28-30, 2015, in Washington, DC.

Objectives

The objectives of the meeting were to update the committee on workgroup progress to date; engage with leading experts on restoration, ecological integrity, and the human dimensions of climate change; learn from regional planners; and agree to an outreach strategy.

Committee Members Present: Mike Anderson, William Barquin, Susan Jane Brown, Robert Cope, Adam Cramer, Daniel Dessecker, Russ Ehnes, Joan May, Peter Nelson, Martin Nie, Candice Price, Greg Schaefer, Angela Sondenaa, Rodney Stokes, Chris Topik, Thomas Troxel, Ray Vaughan, Lindsay Warness

Committee Members Absent: Lorenzo Valdez, James Magagna, Vickie Roberts

Staff: Leanne Marten-DFO, Chris French, Anne Acheson, Annie Goode, Regis Terney, Mindy Hackett

Facilitators: Kathleen Rutherford, Caitlin Doughty and Pam Motley

Agreements and Actions

1. Citizens’ and Government Guides - The committee agreed to the process for finalizing the formatting for both guides (see attached Outreach workgroup breakout session notes). The guides are expected to be published by the end of the fiscal year. In addition to completing the guides, the workgroup will focus on determining where additional guidance is needed and preparing shorter, targeted documents for specific audiences.
2. Committee Outreach - The facilitation team will develop a PowerPoint for the committee to use in their individual outreach. The presentation will provide committee members with talking points and information on the 2012 rule and the committee’s work, allowing for a unified message.
3. The Adaptive Management workgroup will work to finalize the draft recommendations on assessments prior the next full committee meeting (Aug 4-6). The workgroup will also work with the Forest Service’s ecological integrity team to develop an evaluation framework.
4. The Objections workgroup identified three potential work streams: (1) Creating a guide that distinguishes the differences between 218 and 219 (2) Improving the definition of collaboration as it relates to the objections process (and how it differs from NEPA, etc.) and (3) Clarifying the roles of cooperative agencies, responsible agencies and objectors. (see attached Objections workgroup notes).
5. The next meeting is scheduled for August 4-6, 2015 in Juneau, Alaska.

Meeting Summary

Welcome and Committee Purpose

The committee co-chairs, Susan Jane Brown and Rodney Stokes, welcomed the committee. Both expressed that they were looking forward to hearing from the Regional Planners on key challenges and

said that they were impressed with the recommendations coming from the working groups. Leanne Martin, the Designated Federal Official (DFO), welcomed the committee as well.

Committee Member Introductions and Updates

The committee members introduced themselves and updated the group on observations and recent activities related to forest planning. In the past few months several members have presented on the planning rule and committee's work at a variety of events including a National Forest Foundation peer learning webinar, North American Wildlife and Natural Resources Conference and a webinar with The Nature Conservancy for Black History Month. One member will present at the International Association for Public Participation Conference in September in Portland, Oregon.

Designated Federal Official Update

The DFO updated the committee on what has occurred internally since the completion of the directives. Leaders are continuing to offer training on collaboration and public engagement. The Forest Service is in constant contact with the regional planners to learn about challenges in the field and where and how the National Office can assist. The Francis Marian National Forest will be the first plan available for comment under the 2012 rule, due to be released in late May. The agency also provided the committee with a schedule and status of all forests undergoing revision.

Workgroup Updates

The committee's three workgroups reported out on progress made since Meeting 10 (January 27-29, 2015), highlighting areas for recommendation and/or further discussion.

Outreach

The Office of General Council has completed their review of both the Government and Citizens' Guides. The Ecosystem Management Coordination staff will review the substantive comments with the workgroup chairs. The workgroup chairs will have the discretion to accept or reject comments. If necessary they will bring the comments to the full workgroups for discussion. A final review of the text by the Office of Communications is expected to be completed by July or August 2015. A professional graphic designer has been hired to develop the formatting for the guides. The documents will be primarily web based PDF files with active hyperlinks that move throughout the document. The Outreach workgroup has begun work on the formatting/graphics for the guides (see attached Outreach workgroup notes). There will be times throughout the process when the guides will be shared with the full committee, although this will not be a consensus-based process. Those committee members interested in joining the workgroup, may do so. The goal is to publish the documents by the end of September. The facilitation team will also create a PowerPoint template that pulls information and language from the guides for committee members to use in individual outreach efforts, supporting consistent messaging.

Forest Service Public Participation Planning Technical Guide

The purpose of the technical guide will be to clarify the direction for public participation outlined in the directives and broaden the Forest Service's tool kit with best practices, case studies, and strategies. An outline has been circulated to a small team of agency planners and socio-economic experts. The committee will also have the opportunity to comment on the outline and the draft guide. The committee offered several comments including: 1) the observation that the document incorrectly labels tribal and

state governments as public; the correct label is partners; 2) the term ‘behavioral’ in regards to diverse audiences should be changed; and 3) the need to correct the phases of plan revision. The group also discussed additional technical guides that may be produced including: socio-economic factors, ecosystem services, ecological integrity, species of conservation concern, and roles of responsible officials.

Adaptive Management

In the past few months, the workgroup has covered many complex issues which speak to the integration that is necessary within the planning rule. The workgroup is interested in providing guidance on developing an integrated planning process, rather than planning via silos. This is a paradigm shift for the Forest Service. Potential work streams for the group include an evaluation framework, a summary of case studies, a technical guide on adaptive management and continued discussions with the agency. The former Assessment workgroup has developed draft recommendations based on their review of the eight assessments available for public review. The Adaptive Management workgroup will continue to refine these draft recommendations during this meeting (see attached Adaptive Management workgroup breakout session notes).

Objections

The workgroup received and reviewed an After Action Report prepared by the agency on the four forests that have used the 219 objections process. Based on this report and further conversations with the agency, the workgroup feels that they will be in a good position to offer recommendations. Preliminary observations include the need for better structuring of the objections meetings; improved communication between the national office, forests and the public in order to set expectations and clearer guidelines on the role of interested persons and objectors; the potential roles for cooperating agencies, local governments, tribes and collaboratives in the process; the difference between the objectives process and appeals; and the difference between project objections (218) and forest plan objections (219).

Dialogue with USFS Leadership: Identifying Priority Areas for Action

Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary of Agriculture for Natural Resources and the Environment, thanked the committee for all of the support provided to the Forest Service and explained that the committee’s work has helped the agency better implement the Planning Rule. The agency appreciates that the committee has taken what they have learned from the forests on the ground and translated this learning to a national perspective. Committee outreach (including the guides) will be an important and useful next step.

Leslie Weldon, National Forest System Deputy Chief, thanked the committee for their work, noting that while the rule was well launched, there is still a lot of work to be done on ensuring successful implementation. The committee is well positioned to observe the planning process at both the local and national level. Moving forward, the committee can help the agency better understand what is needed to ensure that the rule is well implemented and determine how best to measure success in the long term.

Meryl Harrell, Senior Advisor to the Under Secretary, expressed appreciation for the work of the committee, stating that it has far exceeded the agency’s hopes and observing that the committee’s trust has grown exponentially. The committee’s motto of ‘learn locally, apply nationally’ has been very effective. The committee is well positioned to help the agency understand how the intent of the directives

is playing out on the ground and identifying successful approaches with the goal of improving future implementation of the rule.

The committee and the Forest Service Leadership engaged in a dialogue regarding what the committee has seen on the ground and where the committee's work may lead in the future. The following are highlights of these discussions.

Sharing Forest Management with the Public – The group discussed the need to better demonstrate the work being completed on the ground with the public. While there is a significant role for the Forest Service in this, it is also extremely helpful for the committee to be a part of that outreach through their work. Leadership has testified in Congress about the 2012 planning rule's role in increasing the pace and scale of restoration. The committee can offer advice and support with this outreach. Both the committee and the Forest Service agreed that it is beneficial and necessary to talk about multiple benefits, for both local and broader communities. The group also discussed the potential of a youth advisory committee that could help spread the message in a way that will reach younger generations.

Facilitation and Collaboration – The group discussed the need for the agency to invest in building its collaborative capacity through training for agency employees and making investments in building collaboratives and partnerships. They discussed several examples including the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration Program (CFLRP), Shasta Trinity, Community Wildfire Protection Plans and the Tongass FACA committee. The group agreed that the Forest Service can do better at engaging states and tribal governments as well.

Speed of the Plan – The group discussed the need for the planning process to be efficient to allow forests to better deal with changing conditions and future uncertainty (like sage grouse and wildlife). The aim of adaptive management is to continually weave learning into the process to improve management and ecological integrity while increasing capacity.

Fiscal Capability – The leadership and the committee discussed how fiscal limits may potentially constrain forest plan objectives. The directives call for forests to develop realistic objectives based on anticipated funding, possibly hampering forests' outlook on future management. It was noted that the directives also allow forests to provide information on what management could occur with additional funding. The committee commented that this may be an area where forests need additional guidance.

National Statements – It was noted that the National Office has shared a target number of acres in need of restoration. There is concern that this may be getting ahead of individual forest's planning processes and increasing the tension between bottom-up versus top-down planning. The leadership assured the committee that those numbers are general and intended for Congress. It is important for the agency to stress the amount of work that is needed and what is being completed. They will, however, give the power of the final, specific decisions to the forests.

Preparing Forests for Planning – The group discussed the importance of forests being well prepared for plan revision. The National Office assists forests in assessing their capacity for planning, collaboration

and partnerships and helps identify any needs. The committee expressed their interest in ensuring that forests are prepared and set up for success.

Engaging Minority Communities – The group recognized that while the agency is committed to better engaging minority communities, there is still a large gap. The Forest Service wants to improve this by giving longer term commitments to groups working on this issue as well as building better infrastructure and capacity to engage minority communities.

Expert Panel: Forest Service Restoration Team

The committee met with a panel of restoration experts from the Forest Service (Alex Cleveland, Lindsay Buchannan, Nathan Giusppe, Jim Alegria and Marilyn Buford) to discuss restoration in connection the planning rule. The group discussed the need to better showcase successful efforts around the country; strengthen partnerships to leverage more strategic action; better understand the successes, challenges and opportunities of restoration on the ground; and incorporate lessons learned from project level efforts into the planning process.

The agency emphasized that the rule requires forests to provide for social, economic and environmental sustainability when developing desired conditions. Desired conditions will vary from one part of the country to another based on different ecosystems and social and economic factors. The group agreed that there is a need to view restoration in broad, holistic terms, using Historic Range of Variability (HRV) as one of many tools to aid forests in determining desired conditions. Plans must also be adaptable to changing conditions.

The agency shared insight learned from the Collaborative Forest Landscape Restoration (CFLR) Program: (1) When defining restoration, no two approaches are the same. (2) It is important to use restoration for multiple outcomes. By looking at the landscape scale, a forest can manage for social, ecological and economic benefits. This approach may still require difficult tradeoffs and decisions, but the process is more holistic at this scale. (3) Collaboration increases the capacity to get work done. (4) Accelerating restoration across the forests takes time because for many, it is a new way of doing business.

The agency also noted that the agency is embracing a new manner of operation that relies heavily of collaboration and partnerships; the 2012 rule embodies this sea change. Several new tools like CFLR and Good Neighbor are allowing more work to be completed with less money and staff. They are also operating in an environment where 42% of the Forest Service's budget is used for fire related activities, compared to 16% previously. There is a need to share learning and success stories across partnerships and program areas to increase the pace and scale of restoration on the ground.

Ongoing Conversation: Both the panel and the committee are interested in continuing an open dialogue. The committee is interested in helping where possible. Some ideas include (1) Helping with messaging on how restoration builds more resilient and sustainable ecosystems (2) Looking more deeply at the holistic approach, especially economic and social considerations (3) Sharing successes with the public (4) Identifying potential partnerships and tools (5) Developing an integrated, adaptive approach that incorporates effective monitoring.

Expert Panel: Ecological Integrity Team

The committee met with the Forest Service's Ecological Integrity Panel consisting of Jamie Barber, Greg Hayward, Jim Alegria, and Chris French. The panel members are engaged in ensuring that the ecological integrity and monitoring objectives of the directives are implemented in an effective and consistent manner.

The agency shared insights on how ecological monitoring and assessments interact with the planning rule: (1) the planning rule can build a unified approach for the agency and communities; (2) ecological, economic and social considerations are encompassed within the rule; and (3) monitoring can be improved through pre-planning assessments, setting and managing for desired condition, and conscientious development of plan monitoring and monitoring reports. Overall, implementation of the rule and the establishment of robust monitoring efforts will be the ideal opportunity to create synergy at the national level and help determine if ecological integrity is improving, staying the same, or worsening on the ground and how management is or is not impacting the status. The agency aims to assess the conditions of every national forest over the next 10 to 20 years in order to discern the conditions and trends on each forest, ensuring that by the next planning cycle, forests will have meaningful information on where they've gone and if it has been successful. An essential part of this effort will be to develop consistent monitoring plans so that information gathered at the local level can be condensed into regional and national information.

The team is currently developing guidance for developing assessments, including example outlines and module tools. The goal is to provide education that is useful and thought-provoking but not prescriptive. It is important that forests structure assessments so that they properly set the stage for the entire planning process, helping to determine what components are in need of change and how to structure an effective analysis of plan implementation. The guidance will include questions and ecological worksheets for line officers and planning teams that will support the final directives and set the stage for three key ideas from rule: the use of sound science, embracing community engagement and seeking ecological/social/economic sustainability. The ultimate goal of the agency is to sustain productive, functional ecosystems for the next generation.

Ongoing Conversation: Both the panel and the committee are interested in continuing an open dialogue. The committee is interested in helping where possible. The group discussed how the work of the ecological integrity team overlapped well with the thinking of the Adaptive Management workgroup. The group will continue to discuss how the committee can support the agency with developing guidance for forests. The agency will complete a draft guidance framework by June 30 at which point they will look for support from the regional office and outside the Forest Service. The final framework draft is expected by the end of the calendar year. They look to the committee to be a part of this process and a source of information.

Public Comment

Steve Holmer, Senior Policy Advisor with American Bird Conservancy, shared insights on the Northwest Forest Plan which the organization sees as a success. However, they request that the updated plan address the needs of wide ranging species like the Marbled Murrelet and the Spotted Owl. Both species are heavily impacted by forest fragmentation. The increased use of private timber lands adds to

fragmentation, increasing the burden of federal lands and the Forest Service to protect habitat for these species. The American Bird Conservancy is preparing a document that outlines the principles they would like to see in the updated plan.

Dialogue with Regional Planners

The committee engaged in a dialogue with regional planners from each region of the Forest Service in order to exchange information on key issues, lessons learned and opportunities for joint problem solving (via conference call). The dialogue covered four areas: Public engagement and collaboration; the role of the assessment; information exchange within the agency; and monitoring and adaptive management.

Public Engagement and Collaboration: The committee and regional planners discussed that the public engagement and collaboration required under the new planning rule requires a serious paradigm shift within the Forest Service. The committee was interested in hearing more about the key challenges. One of the hurdles of collaboration is that constituents are coming to the table with their positions but are not necessarily experienced in articulating their interests, creating ‘us versus them’ conversations. The committee discussed that one way to improve this may be to do a lot of groundwork prior to the engagement in order to establish clear and correct expectations.

The regional planners also expressed that it is difficult to navigate between best available science and public participation, especially when the public expects a process similar to NEPA. An additional challenge is the tension between the time it takes for robust public engagement and the requirement that the process be completed in 4 years. The regions stated that the committee could help them improve efficiency when public engagement moves between project and landscape scale plan revisions. Some ideas from the committee included: 1) using examples, like the Flathead, to show a successful example of collaborative work; 2) using third party facilitators as a way to increase credibility and efficiency of conversations, though recognizing that they do not necessarily speed up the process; 3) working with local government and similar processes and products like CWPPs and the Cohesive Strategy; and 4) clustering of National Forests (Though the regional planners identified that this can sometimes be counterproductive when forests with very different ecological considerations are clustered. In addition, clustering can add to the challenge of effectively engaging communities at the appropriate level.)

The Role of the Assessment

The regions felt that there wasn't a clear understanding of the difference between the assessment, plan formulation, and the ultimate NEPA process. People expect to make decisions in the assessment phase that are intended to be made in the plan phase. Additionally, regions feel that when the public conflates these processes, confusion and inefficiencies ensue. The assessment is seen as a great way to build trust with constituents rather than something that is useful for the planning process – though ideally the process should do both. The tension between finishing the assessments and moving to different phases in a timely manner arose again. The group discussed that the assessment and plan phases should set up the adaptive management framework but the regions are assessing if it is better to pick this up later in the process. Both the committee and the regional planners recognized that the assessments are not meeting the expectations of the rule and see the need for improvements.

Information Exchange: The regional planners explained how information is being shared across forests and between early adopters through four different internal avenues: 1) calls with regional directors to share lessons learned; 2) calls with regional planners to share lessons learned; 3) early adopter calls to share lessons learned; and 4) documents posted to a shared website for early and mid-adopters. External processes for information exchange are taking place with the inclusion of the National Forest Foundation and the Institute of Environment Conflict Resolution in several revision processes. The regional planners recognized that there is no formal process by which forests can share lesson learned.

Monitoring and Adaptive Management: The regional planners discussed the requirement for forests with 1982 forest plans to transition to the 2012 rule monitoring requirements and highlighted several challenges including: (1) existing monitoring plans are not well documented and (2) the 2012 rule has new requirements such as climate change and focal species monitoring that were not in the previous rule. The changes will require time to transition. There are currently three forests attempting different monitoring approaches for the 2012 requirement and they will report out on opportunities and challenges.

Ongoing Conversation: The group ended the discussion by asking the regional planners how the committee could support their work. The regions think a public outreach guide that better explains the process and a guide on collaboration for government officials would be helpful.

Presentation: Human Dimensions of Climate Change-Pragmatic Approaches to Understanding and Communicating Risk

Linda Joyce, Supervisory Research Rangeland Scientist at the Forest Service, gave a presentation on the human dimensions of climate change which included a review of the Nez Perce Clearwater Assessment and a discussion of the opportunities for social learning through the development of vulnerability assessments for climate change (via telephone).

Review of Nez Pierce Clearwater Assessment

In reviewing the assessment, Ms. Joyce offered several recommendations. 1) Forests should consult with research professionals prior to commencing the assessment phase to ensure that they have current and accurate information. 2) Assessments should be geared towards meaningfully informing the need for change rather than an encyclopedia of information. 3) All documents used for the assessment should be made available along with a rationale. 4) There may be opportunities to standardize processes for determining several required elements of the assessment, such a carbon stocks.

Review of Nez Pierce Clearwater Vulnerability Assessment for Climate Change

After review of the Nez Pierce Clearwater's Vulnerability Assessment for Climate Change, Ms. Joyce offered several recommendations. 1) If forests contract third parties to develop vulnerability assessments, better guidance should be provided so that the information is relevant to the assessment. With the current strategy, the Forest Service isn't necessarily gaining the right information or learning to prepare strategic actions. (2) These assessments can be platforms for social learning if forests invite the public to participate in their development. The learning cycle for forests and the public can be broken down into three steps: 1. Are we doing things right? 2. Are we doing the right thing? 3. What is the right thing? Ms. Joyce observed that the current assessments are not reaching the third point. It will be important in the future for science and management to work together to incorporate these three steps into the development

of assessments and plan to ensure that adaptive management is being used. When the Forest Service is talking with stakeholders, there is a need to appropriately target the risk conversation. For example, the term climate change may not resonate with all ranchers, but discussing the need to develop management strategies in light of increasing drought will. The conversation should consider future risks and needs. Additionally, forests can look to the 2010 Resource Planning Act Assessment, as a starting point of how drivers of change will affect forest resources.

Planning - Moving Forward

The committee workgroups will hold 2-4 workgroup calls per month to continue on-going work and incorporate input from this meeting. The first call will be used to develop a work plan for May-July that will ensure that groups are well prepared for the next full committee meeting.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for August 4-6, 2015 in Juneau, Alaska. The committee will meet with representatives from the Chugach and the Tongass National Forests. The group discussed the importance of properly preparing for this meeting. In particular, it will be important to connect with the region, forests and stakeholders to clarify the committee's intent and role (learn locally, apply nationally) and to gain greater insight on any challenges the forests are experiencing and/or innovative techniques being used. The committee identified several key areas of interest to pursue that this meeting. The committee would like to learn more about how the 2012 amendment process is working on the Tongass National Forest. Again, the committee will look for nationally-relevant information. The committee is interested in learning more about how climate change, research and partnerships are being incorporated into the Chugach National Forest's planning process. The committee expressed interest in participating in a field trip on the Monday before the formal meeting. The group discussed several potential ideas. The agency will work with the regional office to determine if a field trip is possible.

To prepare for the meeting, the committee will conduct telephone interviews with a broad range of key stakeholders involved in the planning processes on both forests (similar to the process used in preparation for Meeting 10 in Region 8). A conveying report will be prepared by the facilitation team. The coordinating committee will begin work on this immediately and a draft agenda will be shared with the region shortly.