

Identification of Lands Suitable for Recreation Use – Southwestern Region (R3) Plan Revisions

Version 4.0 – April 2010

Operational Draft: This document is prepared to provide guidance to forest plan revision teams. As this guidance is implemented we expect to learn improved ways to do this work. As we learn, this document will be updated. This document was reviewed and revised as appropriate in April 2010 to conform with the requirements of the 1982 Planning Rule Provisions.

Introduction

National Forest System lands are generally suitable for a variety of uses, including recreation. The Responsible Official, as appropriate, shall utilize existing laws, regulation, and policy, as well as social, economic, and ecological considerations to identify suitability of areas within a National Forest System unit. Land use specifically excluded by law, regulation or policy; or use that would result in substantial and permanent impairment of the productivity of the land; or use that is incompatible with the desired conditions for the relevant portion of the analysis area would not be authorized.

The identification of an area as suitable for various uses is *guidance* for project and activity decision making, and is *not a resource commitment or final decision* approving projects and activities. Final decisions on resource commitments are made at the project level.

- **Areas suitable for a particular use** – the particular use on these lands is compatible with the desired condition in the forest plan. This does not mean that the use will occur over the entire area.
- **Areas not suitable for a particular use** – the particular use on these areas is not compatible with the desired conditions of the forest plan. This does not mean that the use will not occur in specific areas.

Background Information

Lands suitable for recreation use are those lands not restricted from recreation use by Presidential, Congressional or administrative constraints; they are suitable for uses that are compatible with desired conditions and objectives for that area. In addition, areas suitable for recreation meet the following objectives for recreation planning, as described in Forest Service Manual 2300 (2302 – OBJECTIVES):

- To provide non-urbanized outdoor recreation opportunities in natural appearing forest and rangeland settings.
- To protect the long-term public interest by maintaining and enhancing open space options, public accessibility, and cultural, wilderness, scenery, and natural resource values.
- To promote public transportation and/or access to National Forest recreation opportunities.
- To shift land ownership patterns as necessary to place urbanized recreation settings into other ownerships to create more public open space and/or natural resource recreation values.

- To encourage the study and enjoyment of nature;
- To highlight the importance of conservation;
- To provide scenic and visual enjoyment; and
- To instill appreciation of the nation's history, cultural resources, and traditional values.

Lands Suitable for Recreation Use

In the Region 3 Plan Revision process, the starting point for the identification of lands as suitable is the existing suitability determination carried forward from current Forest Plans. The concept of the planning rule is that uses are generally suitable unless proven otherwise. This is consistent with the basic philosophy that these are the people's lands, and therefore it is appropriate to have a presumption that lands are suitable for a variety of uses.

Compatibility with desired conditions is the basis for determining whether or not a use is suitable for a particular area. During the need for change evaluations of the existing plan, comparisons between existing conditions and current Forest Plan desired conditions (including changed conditions since the adoption of the current plan) will be used to determine if there is a need for change in existing management direction. Determinations should be made if the current identification of areas suitable for a use is interfering with the ability to manage those areas to achieve desired conditions. If so, the Responsible Official will decide whether there is a need to change the suitability calls in current Forest Plans.

1. **Determine Lands Not Suitable for Recreation.** Lands considered not suitable for recreation are:
 - **Areas restricted for National Security purposes.** Examples include, but not limited to: International Borders; Communication Sites; Electric Substations, Military Ranges; Major Dams; Hydro Electric Power Plants.
 - **Areas that conflict with other resource management objectives.** Examples include, but not limited to areas used for: Mining Operations; Oil and Gas explorations; Research Natural Areas; Sensitive Riparian Areas; Critical T&E Habitat; Municipal Watersheds.
 - **Areas that are withdrawn for administrative purposes or special designation.** Examine existing administrative constraints for recreation, specific to an individual Forest, as promulgated by congressional designation (wilderness, etc.), presidential proclamation, or other administrative set-asides. Examples include, but not limited to: research natural areas, areas closed by special order, and recreation restrictions as applied to wilderness areas, wild and scenic rivers, and significant caves.

Review the current recreation suitability classifications from your existing plan to determine if the above criteria apply. If any of the above criteria have changed, study the area for suitability of recreation use. Document any additions or subtractions.

References which may be used for determining areas not suitable for recreation include: GIS layers related to recreation, State Wilderness Act, Forest Plan, State Wild & Scenic Rivers Act, FSM 2300 and 2700, FSH 2309.11 and 2709.11, consultation with Forest and District specialists, Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE I & II), transportation layer(s), Forest, and Region Special Orders.

2. **Determine Lands Suitable for Recreation.** Lands that are not restricted by the above criteria are generally suitable for recreation.
3. **Document Areas of Agreement and Areas of Disagreement.** Use collaboration to identify areas of agreement or disagreement with considered land suitability. Maintain a written record of all collaborative efforts to document all perspectives regarding appropriate use and to support suitability determinations.
4. **Matrix for Determining Areas Suitable for Recreation.** The following (Table 1) is an example of a matrix for determining areas that are Suitable or Not Suitable for recreation use. However, the ID Team will need to access information on hand as to whether lands are suitable or not.

Table 1. Example Suitability Matrix for Recreation Use

Suitability Criteria	Type of Proposed Recreation Use					
	Winter Snow Play Recreation Area	Class V White Water River Rafting	Heritage Interpretive Site	Developed Recreation Site	Non-Motorized Recreation	Motorized Recreation
Restricted for national security purposes.	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable
Conflict with other resource management direction.	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable
Area with Special Designation (i.e., Wilderness, Wild & Scenic River, Research Natural Area).	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Not Suitable	Suitable	Not Suitable
Area closed for entry by Special Order.	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable
Areas withdrawn for administrative purposes.	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable	Not Suitable
Area meets Forest objectives for natural resource management.	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable
Area meets Forest scenic integrity objectives for scenery management.	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable
Area is on Forest Travel Management Plan.	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable	Suitable

Collaboration

Collaboration is encouraged as an essential part of public participation. Collaboration should occur before, during and continue after a decision has been made on a forest plan revision. Ensure recreation suitability considerations are included in the identified and approved collaboration efforts. Collaborate with public and forest specialists to determine if the current or revised recreation suitability is compatible with the desired use of the land.

GIS

When suitability for recreation management is questionable, as may be the case for special areas, units would begin the suitability determination process by identifying areas that preclude various forms of use due to existing management direction, previous decisions, and/or protection of resources. Existing GIS information will be of value when beginning the task of determining suitability. The following list is a sample of the kind of information that should be used in determining suitability:

- Existing forest service transportation maps displaying NFS roads, trails, and if applicable, areas where off-highway vehicle use has been specifically designated
- Topographic and Terrestrial Ecosystem Survey maps displaying steep slopes and/or sensitive or erosive soils that may preclude development and maintenance of system roads and trails.
- Vegetation and Hydrology maps identifying sensitive areas where some recreation uses could negatively impact natural resources.
- Threatened, endangered, sensitive species and critical habitat maps identifying areas where some recreation uses could negatively impact these species.
- Cultural property maps identifying areas where some recreation uses could negatively impact sensitive archaeological resources.
- Congressionally designated areas (wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, national recreation areas, etc.) where legislation may limit some recreation uses.
- Other special management areas (research natural areas, botanical areas, etc.)
- Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) or Scenery Management System (SMS)
- Land ownership maps including private lands and government jurisdictions.
- Special use information, such as road easements, rights-of-ways, and permitted access to special use developments.
- Previous travel management decisions (if available)
- Sense of Place (SOP) layers that show what the forest is capable of producing in alignment with visitor demand.

Use GIS layers related to recreation to identify areas that meet criteria or restricted and general recreation suitability. Use GIS data layers to identify landscapes, resource management, transportation management, infrastructure, special areas, and areas with use restrictions. For instance, standardized R3 layers applicable to suitability are - Recreation Sites (some may include dispersed areas); Special Areas (includes Wilderness, RNA, etc.); Transportation Layer; Ownership. There is also a tabular data base, not spatial, that will contain the Visitor Use Survey Data. Some Forests may also have GIS layers for scenic classes, ROS/SIO, communication sites, and facilities, although these are not standardized at the Regional level.

Use resource specialist and District personnel throughout the mapping process. Work with Forest GIS personnel to update data resulting from the suitability process.

Tools and Links

Access and Travel Management:

ATM - <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/ohv/>

Code of Federal Regulations (Parts 251 and 261):

CFR 251 and CFR 261 - <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/cfr/index.html>

Forest Service Manual 2300, 2700:

FS Directives – <http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/dughtml/fsm2000.html>

Forest Service Handbook 2309.11, 2709.11:

FS Directives – <http://www.fs.fed.us/im/directives/dughtml/fsh2000.html>

Secretary of Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Section 110 of the National Historic Preservation Act:

NHPA http://www.cr.nps.gov/local-law/FHPL_HistPrsrvt.pdf or
<http://www.achp.gov/NHPA.pdf>

National Visitor Use Monitoring:

NVUM – <http://www.fs.fed.us/recreation/programs/nvum/>

1982 Planning Rule Provisions:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/includes/nfmareg.html>

Recreation Opportunity Spectrum:

ROS – <http://roadless.fs.fed.us/bgdocuments2.shtml>

Scenery Management System

SMS – presented in Agriculture Handbook 701, Landscape Aesthetics – A Handbook for Scenery Management. - <http://www.esf.edu/es/via>

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