

NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) /NFMA (National Forest Management Act, i.e., Forest Planning)

Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines

A forest plan standard is an absolute requirement to be met in the design of projects and activities. A project or activity is consistent with a standard when its design is in accord with the explicit provisions of the standard; variance from a standard in any way is not allowed. In sum, a project or activity may meet the spirit, if not the letter, of a guideline, but must meet the letter of a standard.

A forest plan guideline provides guidance and information for carrying out projects and activities to help achieve the desired conditions and objectives. Guidelines do not force action but set out design criteria that should apply when an action is being taken. Guidelines may state technical and scientific specifications. Guidelines are not be written in terms of a mandatory command or prohibition, but in terms of project design criteria that “should” or “should not” be employed. Projects need not be designed in exact accord with a guideline’s wording, as long as the design is as effective in meeting guideline’s purpose.

A project or activity may deviate from a guideline but still be consistent with the forest plan (no forest plan amendment needed) if: (1) the project or activity design is in accord with the explicit provisions of the guideline, or (2) the project or activity design varies from the explicit provisions of the guidelines but is as effective in meeting the purpose of the guideline to maintain or contribute to the attainment of relevant desired conditions and objectives. If the increased size of the opening did not maintain or allow movement towards desired conditions and objectives, a plan amendment would be needed.

Deviation from a plan standard or guideline as part of a project decision:

- Standards: since standards are absolute requirements and variance from a standard is not allowed, you must amend your forest plan in order to have a project decision that deviates from a plan standard.
- Guidelines: deviation is allowed as long as the deviation meets the intent (if not the letter) of the plan guideline - such deviations do not require a plan amendment but must be specifically addressed in the project documentation.