



US Forest Service

El Yunque National Forest Briefing Paper

February 2013

Topic: Early Adopter Plan Revision Status, El Yunque National Forest

Background: At nearly 29,000 acres, the El Yunque National Forest (EYNF) is one of the smallest forests in the National Forest System, yet one of the most biologically diverse. It is the largest protected area in Puerto Rico, an island of 35 by 110 miles, with a population of nearly 4 million.

Seven major watersheds with headwaters in the EYNF, divide the Forest into eight municipalities. Water is an important natural feature and commodity; nearly 250,000 people residing in the surrounding municipalities depend on the waters of the EYNF. The watersheds are also important natural landscape connectors to the wetland, coastal, and marine ecosystems in the eastern portion of the Island.

Over 1 million visitors come to the Forest each year. The EYNF is an important recreation and ecotourism location contributing economic benefits to the island's tourism industry, local businesses and neighboring communities.

One of the oldest forest reserves in the western hemisphere, the Forest is co-managed as the Luquillo Experimental Forest under the direction of the International Institute of Tropical Forestry (IITF), a world leader in tropical forest and ecological research. The Forest was proclaimed a Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere program in 1976.

Other unique features include the management of habitat of the Puerto Rican parrot, an endangered species of which less than 30 birds survive in the forest. Hurricanes create natural disturbances and as the island's population increases, urban encroachment and invasive species present additional management challenges.

Previous Forest Planning Efforts: In 1986, the EYNF Plan was appealed due to proposals for timber harvesting, road and trail construction and lack of information provided in Spanish. The 1997 Revised Forest Plan, was not appealed and addressed issues including Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations, preservation of the remaining primary forest and further protection of PR Parrot habitat, watersheds and aquatic ecosystems. Other important topics included providing for recreation opportunities including interpretation and environmental education, conducting research while protecting resources, and restoration efforts following Hurricane Hugo in 1989.

Current Early Adopter Planning Status: The EYNF began its early adopter plan revision effort in August 2012 by announcing to the public the beginning of the Assessment phase. EYNF and IITF specialists working as part of the core Planning Team are preparing technical reports for the Assessment.

Key Points:

- **Planning Assessment Phase**
 - IITF staff is providing environmental research and social/economic analyses support. The Template for Assessing Climate Change Impacts and Management Options (TACCIMO) team, in conjunction with IITF, has developed an extensive literature search on climate change implications in the Caribbean.

- A local NGO, the Center for Landscape Conservation (CCP) is providing technical assistance during the Assessment in hydrology, cultural resources, soils, botany, planning and economics.
- Assessment working groups and latest scientific information on El Yunque are being collected. Carbon stocks on the Forest are being assessed through the Forest Inventory and Analysis Program. EYNF and IITF are engaged in discussions on ecological services as related to the Forest plan revision.
- **Collaboration Efforts**
 - The Forest has not done large public participation efforts in recent years. Yet, the Forest has been working closely with partners and stakeholders in science and academia, federal and local agencies and the tourism industry. The National Collaboration Cadre (NCC) was invited by the Forest and worked closely with EYNF to develop a process responsive to the local situation.
 - The NCC teamed with a local NGO, Environmental Policy Solutions (EPS), to help bridge cultural and language issues to conduct a series of “listening sessions” with members of the community and employees in September, 2012. Information gathered from the sessions helped in the design of a collaboration workshop.
 - A two-day collaboration workshop was conducted in December 2012 by the NCC and EPS. About 100 participants representing mainly local communities were joined by representatives from federal and commonwealth agencies, science and academia, youth organizations, tourism industry, environmental organizations, and Forest Service employees.
 - As an important outcome of the meeting, ten participants agreed to work as members of a steering committee to help further define collaborative and public participation strategies and assist in the development of working groups on Forest Plan topics. Several collaboration models were developed at the workshop. There was overall support from many workshop participants to assist with working groups and in further collaborative efforts.
 - The local NGO, CCP, will also assist in the development and facilitation of effective collaborative and public participation efforts with local community members
- **Important Findings from Collaboration Workshops**
 - There is a need to involve the local community and municipalities more in forest management actions and decision making processes. The community expressed interest in being engaged in discussions to restore and maintain the health and quality of the forest.
 - There needs to be more education on the Forest plan with the public and communities. The Forest faces the challenge of how to work in collaboration with diverse stakeholders some with high levels of knowledge and technical expertise in Forest conservation and planning and other stakeholders with limited knowledge in these areas, but strong beliefs, values and attitudes about the Forest. Developing effective communication tools and appropriate technologies and strategies to collaborate successfully with these various stakeholders will be explored.

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EL YUNQUE NF

NATIONAL FACA PLANNING RULE MEETING

WE BELIEVE THAT WE CAN
CREATE A GREAT FUTURE FOR
EL YUNQUE

VISION

Topics

What is our planning story?

What is the test?

What scenario are we facing?

What are the major findings from the assessment phase?

What have we experienced during collaboration?

What do the people want?

Can it be employed?



What is our story?

Over 100 years of protected area management.

What is our planning story?

- **Currently under 1997 LRMP for Caribbean NF/Luquillo Experimental Forest**
- **Issues**
 - **Sustainable timber production while assuring compatibility with a diversity of other Forest values.**
 - **Congressional designation for Wilderness**
 - **Congressional designation as Wild, Scenic or Recreation Rivers**
 - **Protection of primary forest**
 - **Providing recreation opportunities while protecting ecological values**
 - **Protection of wildlife while conducting other Forest management activities**
 - **Providing and protecting the Forest's water quantity and quality**
 - **Providing and managing appropriate Forest access**
 - **Meeting the needs of tropical forestry research while protecting the Forest's environmental values**

How we became Early Adopters?

- ❖ Great integration and collaboration between National Forest and Experimental Forest
- ❖ Small analysis area
- ❖ Successful implementation of 1997 LRMP
- ❖ Ample information from scientist and academia due to experimental forest designation
- ❖ The Revision is part of the Forest multi-year success strategy!

ARE THE PLANNING RULE AND
DIRECTIVES A STRAIGHT
FORWARD CONCEPTS THAT CAN
OFFER WHAT THE PUBLIC
WANTS?

Major Findings

- The innovation fits well. It allows us to address social, ecological and economic demands.
- The concept of sustainability is accepted.
- The landscape scale is welcomed.
- There is a risk of losing collaborative gains because of the speed of analysis.

Lesson 1 - Technology fits the assessment phase

Subject

- Selection of key indicators
- Riparian Areas

Innovation, Problem, Mistake, Challenge

- New interpretation of terrestrial ecosystems. Challenging number of species.
- New paradigm of a wetland over 600 meters in elevation.

Lesson 1 - The technology fits the assessment phase.

Subject

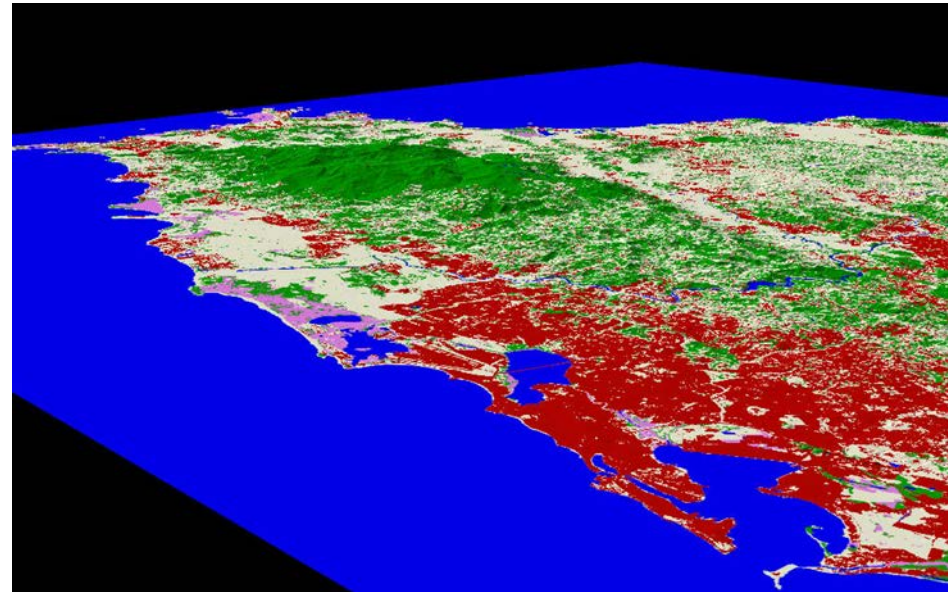
- Natural Range of Variation
- Ecosystem Services

Innovation, Problem, Mistake, Challenge

- Allows us to reflect on the decadal mode of tropical storms versus our current management scheme.
- Foundation work is completed. Challenge is to develop plan components and effects analysis.

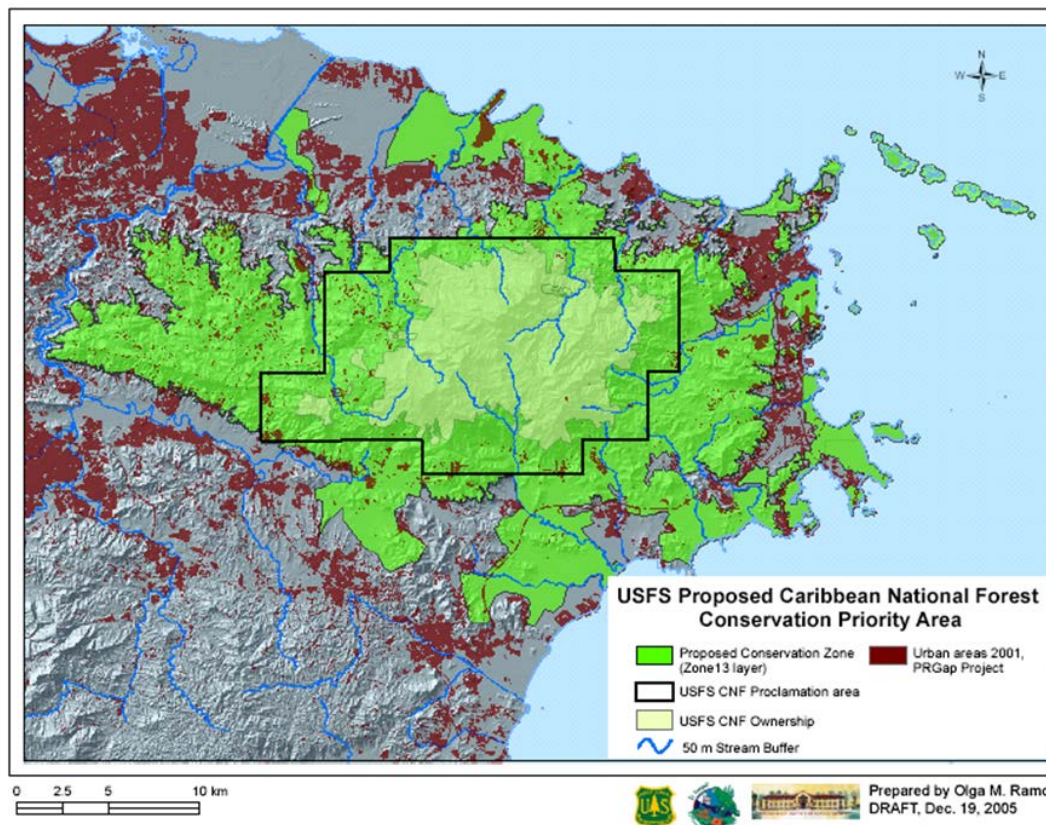
Lesson 2 – Sustainability

- The concept is accepted by stakeholders.
- We adopted the model of the National Sustainability Report.

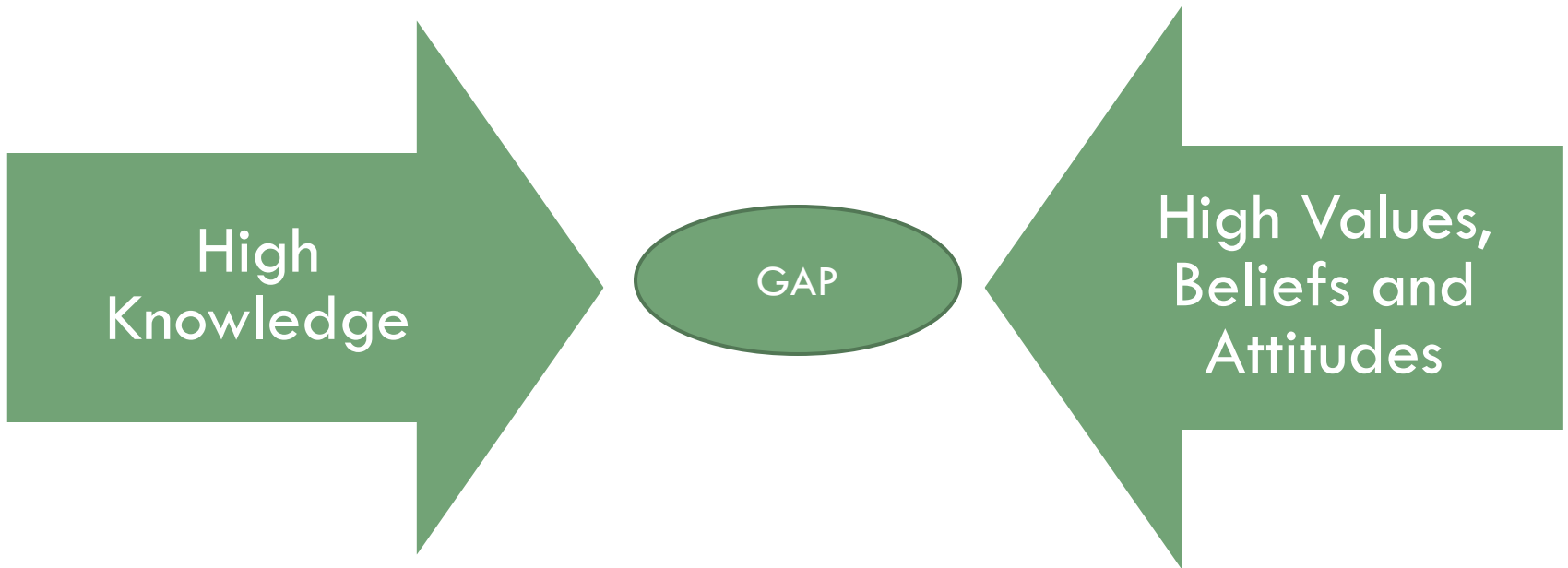


Lesson 3 – Landscape Scale

- ▣ All Lands Plan for Northeast Puerto Rico
- ▣ Watershed Condition Framework for EYNF



Lesson 4 – Collaboration



Lesson 4 – Collaboration

What the public wants?

- Information
- Communication
- Full participation

Our plan is to:

- Simplify it
- Diversify delivery
- Change our management model

Conclusions

- Can the NPR/Directives be employed?
 - Yes
- Are the NPR/Directives offer what the people want?
 - Yes
 - Workshop Results

