

# **Planning Rule Federal Advisory Committee**

## **Written Public Comments**

### **February 20-22, 2013**

The Forest Service received three written comments during the second meeting of the federal advisory committee from:

**Recreational Aviation Foundation**

**Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association**

**Bk1492@aol.com**

All comments are displayed on the following pages.



**Recreational Aviation Foundation**  
Preserving, Maintaining, and Creating Recreational Airstrips  
1711 West Collage St. Bozeman, MT 59715  
[www.theraf.org](http://www.theraf.org)

## **RAF USFS FACA COMMENTS AND COMMITMENT**

### **WHY WE ARE OBSERVING FACA MEETINGS:**

Your contributions to The New Planning Rule implementation and your collaboration on the development of associated Planning Directives will directly influence the outcome of NFS planning at all levels. Previous Planning Rules and Directives have not included aviation considerations. The Recreational Aviation Foundation (RAF) wishes to insure the inclusion and recognition of aviation as a legitimate recreational use during future planning processes involving NFS lands.

### **HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:**

The National Forest System has had many back country and primitive airstrips open for recreational use for decades; in most cases, since the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. For example, one of the Early Adopter National Forests you will hear from during your February meetings, the Nez Perce-Clearwater, has 7 existing and open airstrips within their jurisdiction; most of them came into being over 50 years ago.

Recently, with RAF participation and support, Arizona and New Mexico have reopened previously closed USFS airstrips to be used for recreational purposes. In 2009, the Lewis and Clark National Forest opened a new airstrip called Russian Flat in the Little Belt Mountains in central Montana. This strip was constructed from donated funds and volunteer labor and equipment furnished by the pilot community. The pilot communities in many states help maintain backcountry airstrips through the Forest Service Volunteer program.

### **INFRASTRUCTURE:**

Airstrips on NFS lands are valuable properties, serving the needs of the Forest Service, DEA, Homeland Security, US Border Patrol, as well as recreational users. These strips are critical as emergency landing fields for aircraft overflying FS lands and are used across the US as emergency medical extraction sites for injured campers, hikers, and forest workers.

Unfortunately, airstrips and aviation are often "lost" or overlooked during planning efforts. In the past, they have not been directly recognized through planning guidance (Planning Rule) as bona fide infrastructure on the same level as campgrounds, roads, trails, and historical sites; even though most have long histories of use by the public to access recreational opportunities.

### **NEW PLANNING RULE BACKGROUND:**

The Recreational Aviation Foundation participated in all of the Planning Rule roundtables at the Washington DC level, as well as numerous regional planning sessions. As a direct result of this participation, aviation and airstrip considerations have been included in the New Planning Rule. Furthermore, planners working within the New Rule have been directed to treat aviation resources as valuable recreational infrastructure during the development of forest plans. The specific wording in the New Planning Rule is as follows:

*"Sustainable recreation; including recreation settings, opportunities, and access; and scenic character. Recreation opportunities may include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation **on land, water, and in the air.**"*  
PAGE 21266 FEDERAL REGISTER / VOL. 77, NO. 68 / MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2012 / RULES AND REGULATIONS, 219.10.b (1) (i), UNDER MULTIPLE USE

Also, the Preamble of the New Planning Rule specifically states (middle column center of page):

*"The rule recognizes and states in 219.10 and the definition in 219.19 that recreational opportunities include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation **on land, water, and air.** Examples include activities such as hiking, biking, hunting, ..... **recreational aviation, hang gliding and many more.**"*

Additionally, in the same column, the last paragraph, at the bottom of the page, reads:

*"Responsible officials must also consider placement and management of infrastructure, including recreational facilities. It is appropriate to refer to such facilities as infrastructure because recreational facilities are fixed capital installations that enhance recreational experiences. These facilities include: campgrounds, roads, trails, **backcountry airstrips**, and drinking water and waste water."* PAGE 21222 FEDERAL REGISTER / VOL. 77, NO. 68 / MONDAY, APRIL 9, 2012 / RULES AND REGULATIONS

The U.S. House of Representatives Appropriation Committee inserted language in their 2012 report to the full House of Representatives which stated in part:

***"Back-country airstrips.**—The Committee notes that backcountry airstrips are an appropriate use of certain National Forest System (NFS) lands that can provide enhanced access for a variety of legitimate activities. The Committee encourages the Forest Service to support, through cooperative relationships with pilots and other interested user groups, the operation and maintenance of appropriate, existing **backcountry airstrips as part of a balanced, safe, and efficient forest transportation system.** The Committee urges the Forest Service to evaluate whether it is appropriate to establish additional backcountry airstrips on NFS lands as part of the land management planning process and consistent with applicable Federal Aviation Administration regulations (49 U.S.C. 1349). Further, the Committee directs the Forest Service to provide within 90 days upon enactment of this Act, an inventory of backcountry airstrips presently under Forest Service jurisdiction; a detailed description, including examples of the management, conservation, recreational, and public safety and security benefits and uses of existing airstrips; a description of any existing conflicts that presently hinder or may hinder operational use of any such airstrips in the future; a description of the primitive or wilderness values of the area in the vicinity of the airstrips, including environmental and habitat values that may be affected by the airstrip and its use; and an accounting of operation and maintenance costs incurred by the Forest Service in fiscal years 2010 and 2011 related to the present inventory of **backcountry airstrips.**"* (PAGE 92 112TH CONGRESS REPORT 1ST SESSION HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES REPORT 112-151 DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATION BILL, 2012)

The subsequent House Interior Appropriations Bill abbreviated part of the House Appropriation Committee Report (as stated above) with the following language:

***"Back-country airstrips.—In place of the reporting requirements in the House Report for back-country airstrips, within one year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Forest Service is directed to provide the Committees with a general assessment of back-country airstrips on National Forest System lands with recommendations for improving their function as an important component of the forest transportation and recreation system."***

PAGE H9600  
CONGRESSIONAL RECORD VOL. 157 WASHINGTON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2011 NO. 193—BOOK II  
CONFERENCE REPORT ON H.R. 2055, CONSOLIDATED APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2012

### **MANDATE:**

Given the language in the New Planning Rule and the Preamble to the New Planning Rule, it is obvious the Forest Service intends that backcountry airstrips and recreational access via those airstrips be considered in future forest plans. Also, given the language in the Appropriations Committee report and the Interior Appropriations Bill, Congress expects (and is directing) the Forest Service to inventory, support, improve, and plan for backcountry airstrips within the NFS.

Unfortunately, the RAF has observed that initial EA (Early Adopter) planning drafts have not reflected this mandate or expectation. That being said, the collaboration process is working well and all indications are that RAF efforts to correct these omissions are being recognized. We believe the Planning Directives being influenced by the FACA members can prevent these errors of exclusion and omission as they relate to USFS infrastructure and recreational opportunities.

### **METHODOLOGY:**

Planning Directives should assist planners in understanding aviation as an alternate method of transportation used to access recreational opportunities such as hiking, fishing, hunting, and general enjoyment of the outdoors. The Directives should impart to planners the historical and recreational value of including airstrips in their infrastructure planning. This directed awareness would outline for planners the authority and direction to incorporate airstrips and aviation in new forest plans, forest plan revisions, and travel plans.

Here are some advantages realized by directly including backcountry airstrips in forest plans:

- Airstrips encompass a small footprint compared to roads and trails (*usually around +/- 2500 ft x75ft -100ft, often located in a relatively flat, natural meadow*)
- Airstrips accrue low maintenance costs (*often maintained by volunteers*)
- Airstrips yield low impact on recreational dispersion (*forest visitors move from populated areas to the backcountry without the need for roads or trails*)
- Airstrips retain low ecological impact (*airplane campers may be equated to backpackers because of the limited load carrying capacity of small aircraft*)
- Airstrips provide secondary internal trail head access points (*they disperse hikers to little used trails, relieve trail congestion, and reduce trail erosion*)

Aircraft and pilots constitute a vastly different classification of forest visitor. Here's why:

- Aircraft do not have powered wheels or hooves, and do not cause trail damage.
- Qualifying as a pilot involves extensive and lengthy training to stringent FAA mandated standards
- Pilots must pass a comprehensive FAA medical exam and undergo a flight review with an FAA authorized check pilot every two years
- Pilots must maintain published FAA currency requirements for takeoffs and landings; in some cases, these requirements must be accomplished every 90 days
- Legally, pilots cannot drink any amount of alcohol within 8 hours of a flight.

The aircraft they fly are no less regulated, requiring (as a minimum) a costly annual inspection by an FAA licensed aircraft mechanical inspector. Deficiencies found during these inspections must be addressed by replacement or overhaul before the airplane can be returned to service. Non-compliance with FAA pilot and aircraft regulations can result in loss of license, monetary fines, and incarceration. **No other method of transportation or recreational activity has such rigorous qualifications and requirements.**

Additionally, backcountry pilots are trained to *"FLY-IT-IN and FLY-IT-OUT"*. They are trained and encouraged to practice proper outdoor recreational habits and etiquette.

#### **THE RAF COMMITMENT:**

Exclusion of airstrip assets in forest planning processes may be precipitated by a lack of understanding by land managers of the contributions airstrips can provide to the recreation and travel spectrum of a forest. The Recreational Aviation Foundation is ready to assist FACA Members and the Planning Staff, in the development of specific Planning Directives essential to correct and prevent such exclusions.

We believe your committee work on the New Planning Rule Implementation and the Planning Directives goes beyond public participation and collaboration for USFS rule making. It is an opportunity for committee members to directly influence individual Forest Managers' understanding of the New Planning Rule as it relates to public needs and Congressionally expressed guidance for NFS lands.

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***The RAF Mission: "Keeping the legacy of recreational aviation strong by preserving, maintaining and creating public use recreational and backcountry airstrips nationwide."***

U.S. Forest Service National Advisory Committee

Forest Planning Rule Implementation

February 21, 2013

Subject: Albuquerque Planning Rule Committee Meeting, February 20, 2013 (comments)

Dear Committee Members,

I would like to start by thanking the USFS and the planning rule committee for the invitation to attend and participate in the subject meeting. The first day of the three day meeting provided the opportunity to listen to the committees' presentations and discussion. It also provided the opportunity to address the committee briefly. Based on my observations and the verbal comments at this meeting, I found it prudent to formally address the committee Identifying my concerns and recommendations at this stage of the Planning Rule Implementation process. The USFS committee has now also developed Planning Rule Directives in an attempt to revise the Forest Service Land Management Planning policy structure.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the committee for selecting Albuquerque NM Region 3 as the place for conducting this meeting. It is of the utmost importance to first reflect and identify the geographic surroundings and the "people" that the Planning Rule process will impact. The "Southwestern Region" of the National Forest System encompasses approximately 20 million acres between the state of Arizona and New Mexico. The five national forests in New Mexico are critical to the economy, and social structure of our state's families. The history of these forests and the dependency on natural resources is as important today as it was in the sixteen hundreds following the establishment of the Spanish era in 1598. The rural communities and counties within the Region continue to depend on and benefit from the historic uses of the national forest lands. Those grassroots industries such as Ranching, Farming, Logging, Mining, and all those consumptive uses that enable are people and communities to remain sustainable.

The complex task of the Planning Rule process should provide the policy and direction to the FS agency: in balancing the needs of the people, managing the use of the resources in a manner that promotes high standards of living and that is conducive to the environment. The preservation of our historic, cultural and national heritage is equally of importance in maintaining who we are as people, especially those Native American and colonial era Hispanic communities.

The concerns we (Ranchers) have with the Planning Rule Process starts with the fact that we provided comments to the Federal Register on the "Proposed Planning Rule" and the FS agency did not address or respond to our comments as a "minority class of people". We identified that inadequacy existed within the Planning Rule, and also now the proposed directives will not provide the comprehensive policy changes that are need. Therefore we have grave concern that the proposed changes to FS Policy and Regulations may produce negative impacts specifically to the economy, custom and culture of rural New Mexico.

The Proposed Planning Rule Directives process intent, to make language revisions changes to the FS Manual and FS Handbook Chapters for the Rule implementation is inadequate. These proposed changes to the LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN Chapter 20, 23.22e-Rangelands, Forage, and Grazing for example, do not address key essential provision from NEPA or Public Law 91-190 specifically; (Title 1, Sec.101, (b) In order to carry out the policy set forth in this Act, it is the continuing responsibility of the Federal Government to use all practicable means, consistent with other essential considerations of national policy, to improve and coordinate Federal plans, functions, programs, and resources to the end that the Nation may –

(4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice:

(5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities:)

Once again the Proposed Rule and Directives do not set forth the necessary policy and requirements as they are written to address the referenced law. This specific section of the FS Handbook do not establish the policy language to address and ensure the needs of the people that are economically and socially depended on the Forest Service Lands natural resources (like ranching).

It is therefore my recommendation to the Planning Rule Advisory Committee (action item) that the Planning Rule and the Proposed Directives be assessed against Federal Laws such as NEPA (P.L. 91-190), the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act (P.L. 86-517) and all other "Statutory Authorities" identified for the management and administration of the National Forest System. It appears the specific provisions (above) in NEPA are not disseminated down to the specific FS Handbook section referenced above. There is no continuity in addressing the provision of this law in the existing hierarchy of FS Plans and documents from the top down or the reverse. A matrix should be developed in the crosswalk of these specific laws against the "Planning Rule" and proposed revision to the FS Manual and Handbook.

In closing, we appreciate the effort and commitment of the Planning Rule Advisory Committee, and once again emphasize the importance of the Planning Rule process. The proposed changes to the Forest Service Land Management have a direct impact to the livelihood of all New Mexicans. We intend to comment on the Proposed Directives through the Federal Register comment period process. We would like to continue to work with the Planning Rule Advisory Committee and provide our experience and expertise towards the development of sound and comprehensive FS Policies.

Sincerely,

David P. Sanchez

Northern New Mexico Stockman's Association, Board of Directors

505-927-9024

**Helwig, Jennifer A -FS**

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**From:** bk1492@aol.com  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 13, 2013 11:03 AM  
**To:** Helwig, Jennifer A -FS; Jasper, Chalonda -FS; INFO@TAXPAYER.NET; MEDIA@CAGW.ORG; TODAY@NBC.COM; INFO@IDAUSA.ORG; info@defenders.org; BROADS@GREATOLDBROADS.ORG; CONTACT@WILDHORSEPRESERVATION.ORG; INFO@PEER.ORG  
**Cc:** AMERICANVOICES@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV; RUSH.HOLT@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV; SPEAKERBOEHNER@MAIL.HOUSE.GOV  
**Subject:** Fwd:PUBLIC COMMENT ON FEDERAL REGISTER - PLANNING VACATION TRIPS IN NEW MEXICO AND HIDING OUT FROM THE PUBLIC ARE YOU fs and its slash and burn plans

I DO NOT SUPPORT GOUGING AMERICAN TAXPAYERS WORKING 2 AND 3 JOBS TO STAY ALIVE AND PAY THEIR HIGH TAXES SO THE US FOREST SERVICE CAN TAKE VACATION TIME N NEW MEXICO. THIS MEETING SHULD BE IN WASHINGTON DC AND SHOULD BE HELD ON WEBINAR SO THAT ALL US CITIZENS, WHO OWN ALL THSE LANDS, HAVE FULL VIEW OF WHAT YOU ARE UP TO. THIS MEETING SEEMS TO EITHER BE TO HIDE OUT OR TAKE VACATION ON THE WALLETS OF US CITIZENS, WHO WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING TO THEIR FORESTS.

WE NEED SMALLER, CHEAPER GOVT. THIS IS SIMPLY TAKING ADVANTAGE OF TAXPAYERS TO SPEND AND SPEND AND SPEND. THE FOREST IS NO BETTER OFF FOR THIS VACATION TIME IN NEW MEXICO IS IT? WHY IS ALL OUT TAX DOLLARS GOING ON SPENDING FOR GOVT FAT CAT BUREAUCRATIC EMPLOYEES? THE FORESTS LOSE OUT UNDER THIS STUPID WASTEFUL FULOF OVERSPENDING PLAN.

WE WANT A WEBINAR SO WE KNOW WHAT YOU ARE PLANNING TO DO WITH THE LAND WE OWN. 325 MILLION PEOPLE OWN THAT LAND -NOT YOU FAT CAT EMPLOYEES. THIS IS A REAL IMPOSITION ON AMRICAN TAXPAYERS. THIS IS SIMPLY ANOTHER SNEAKY SECRET FAT CAT TAKING ALL IT CAN GET AND RIPPING OFF AND ROBBING US TAXPAYERS AND OWNERS OF THESE LANDS. THIS COMMENT IS FOR THE PUBLIC RECORD. JEAN PUBLIC

THE FLEEING OF AMERICA BY THE FAT CAT BUREAUCRATS!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

[Federal Register Volume 78, Number 29 (Tuesday, February 12, 2013)]  
[Notices]  
[Pages 9883-9884]  
From the Federal Register Online via the Government Printing Office [[www.gpo.gov](http://www.gpo.gov)]  
[FR Doc No: 2013-03129]

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DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Forest Service

National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule

AGENCY: Forest Service, USDA.

ACTION: Notice of meeting.

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SUMMARY: The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule will meet in Albuquerque, NM. The committee operates in compliance with the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The purpose of the committee is to provide advice and recommendations on the implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Rule. The meeting is also open to the public. The purpose of the meeting is to advance the

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dialogue from the first meeting and build a broader understanding of issues associated with implementation of the new planning rule. Another objective of the meeting is to continue to define areas where the committee can provide the most valuable input and recommendations for implementation of the new rule.

DATES: The meeting will be held on February 19-22, 2012, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Mountain Time.

ADDRESSES: The meeting will be held at the Albuquerque Service Center Academy located at 4000 Masthead NE., Albuquerque, NM 87109; Rooms 131-133.

Written comments may be submitted as described under Supplementary Information. All comments, including names and addresses when provided, are placed in the record and are available for public inspection and copying. The public may inspect comments received at 1601 N Kent Street, Arlington, VA 22209, 6th Floor. Please call ahead to 202-205-0895 to facilitate entry into the building to view comments.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jennifer Helwig, Ecosystem Management Coordination, 202-205-0892, [jahelwig@fs.fed.us](mailto:jahelwig@fs.fed.us) or Chalonda Jasper, Ecosystem Management Coordination, 202-260-9400, [cjasper@fs.fed.us](mailto:cjasper@fs.fed.us).

Individuals who use telecommunication devices for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m., Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The following business will be conducted: (1) Determine and define committee work plans, (2) discuss findings from smaller working groups, and (3) administrative tasks. Further information, including the meeting agenda, will be posted on the Planning Rule Advisory Committee Web site at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/planningrule/committee>.

Anyone who would like to bring related matters to the attention of the committee may file written statements with the committee staff before the meeting. Written comments must be sent to USDA Forest Service, Ecosystem Management Coordination, 201 14th Street SW., Mail Stop 1104, Washington, DC, 20250-1104. Comments may also be sent via email to Jennifer Helwig at [jahelwig@fs.fed.us](mailto:jahelwig@fs.fed.us) or Chalonda Jasper at [cjasper@fs.fed.us](mailto:cjasper@fs.fed.us), or via facsimile to 202-205-1012. A summary of the meeting will be posted at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/planningrule/committee> within 21 days of the meeting.

Meeting Accommodations: If you require sign language interpreting, assistive listening devices or other reasonable accommodation, please request this in advance of the meeting by contacting the person listed in FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT. All reasonable accommodation requests are managed on a case-by-case basis.

Dated: January 30, 2013.  
Calvin N. Joyner,  
Associate Deputy Chief, National Forest System.

[FR Doc. 2013-03129 Filed 2-11-13; 8:45 am]  
BILLING CODE 3410-11-P