

# CHALLENGE OPPORTUNITY/RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNITIES NEAR NATIONAL FORESTS

## COMMUNITY GUIDE FOR FOREST PLANNING NO. 3 Public Involvement and “Participatory Management” in National Forest Planning and Decisionmaking



**The Situation**—Consider the following scenario. Citizens attending a public meeting held by a federal agency to obtain citizen input decide they want to put together a resolution, vote on it, present it to the agency, and demand that the agency representative agree—maybe even sign his or her name supporting the resolution. Federal agency personnel refuse. The citizens are angry. After all, don’t the agency personnel work for them? If they do, don’t they have to do what the people want? Why should anyone come out to participate anyway, if the agency doesn’t have to do “what the citizens want?”

**Participatory Management**—What is happening here is called “Participatory Management.” Participatory management is required of nearly all federal agencies, including the USDA Forest Service. What it means is simply that, even though there are federal laws about how National Forests are to be managed in general, forest managers are still required to involve the public again in the actual planning for and implementation of their responsibilities at the local level.



However, although such participatory management is required, the decisions and management

practices of federal agency representatives are constrained by various federal objectives, regulations, and guidelines. Decisions must reflect appropriate scientifically based principles, as well as the collective will of all citizens, including those who may be far away.

### **Public Involvement Plans**

National Forest managers are required to prepare and make available specific “Public Involvement Plans” for the steps they will go through in preparing a Forest Plan and Forest Plan amendments. Community folks who want to partner with the USDA Forest Service, or who want to have input into the planning process, should obtain these Public Involvement Plans. In fact, in many cases, if they express interest, USDA Forest Service managers will include them in the preparation of these “Public Involvement Plans.”

For example, National forest management is guided by the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and the National Environmental Policy Act

(NEPA). These acts, passed by Congress, are “translated” into detailed regulations, which the USFS must follow. While these acts require public involvement in planning for National Forest lands, Forest Service personnel are often also bound to carry out specific portions of NFMA, NEPA, and other laws that may pose direct conflicts with local desires and opinions.

Although required to involve the public, federal agencies' options in doing so are limited in other ways as well as by NFMA and NEPA. One important law regulating public involvement is the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). This act is designed to prevent the “revolving door” between public regulatory commissions and the agencies they regulate. It imposes severe limits upon the way that federal agencies may take advice from organized groups of citizens, presumably to guarantee that federal agencies and their programs are not “captured” by certain organized special interest groups. Local governments are not so severely limited by FACA, so some community citizens may find the use of local government to be an effective way to have input into a federal agency's planning and implementation. Finally, federal agencies generally are not allowed to carry out public opinion surveys.

### **What you and your community can do to build partnerships**

To better inform yourselves about Forest Planning and Management:

- Ask to be put on the mailing list of the local Ranger District
- Obtain a copy of the current Forest Plan and its major amendments, or a summary
- Obtain copies of Public Involvement Plans
- Go to public meetings held by the National Forest whenever you can
- Visit the local Ranger District office and let them know that you want to be involved

To help Forest Service managers get involved with the community

- Invite Forest Service managers to make presentations about their plans and planning processes to clubs and organizations to which you belong.
- Go out of your way to invite them and encourage them to become involved in community development and planning efforts going on in your county or community.

To get your community involved:

- Organize a “study group” to work closely with the Forest Service in the Planning process.
- Develop a local mechanism for “bringing everyone to the table,” to identify the “common ground” that exists in the community, even among those with the most extreme views, so as to have a common message from the community to the USDA Forest Service.
- Talk to your community leaders about the need to use the Forest Planning process as an opportunity for the community to take a careful look at its own future.

### **Advantages of Participatory Management—**

In spite of how complicated participatory management is there are many good things that can come from it. First, community people can have at least some input into the plans of federal agencies (What is clear is that community people can't have input if they don't get involved.) Second, federal agencies have much to gain from knowing the preferences, special knowledge and insights of local community people. Third, community people become more informed about public management issues that affect them. They may even gain a sense of empowerment from their involvement and a sense of commitment to the plans and actions, which result. Finally, collaborative relationships and partnerships can be built based upon face-to-face interaction with the federal agency staffs responsible for implementation.

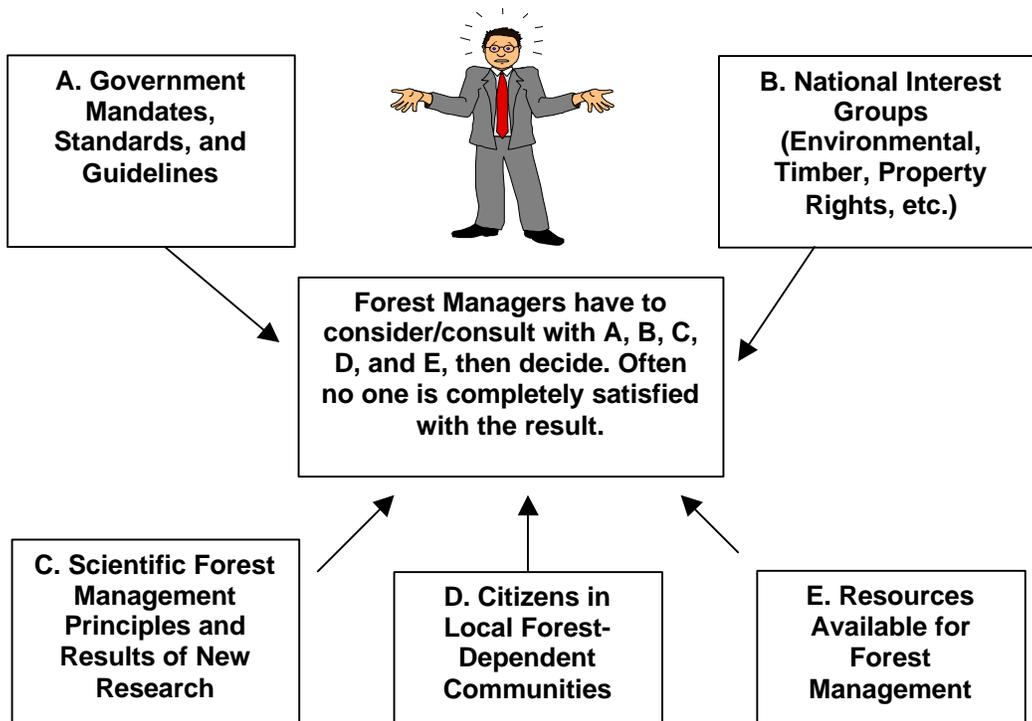
The keys to effective community participation are commitment and information. The more accurate information citizens have, and the harder they work, the more effective they will be. This is, of course, circular. Citizens learn by being involved, and the quality of their involvement increases as they

learn. And citizens can be more effective if their involvement extends beyond one particular point, but starts early in the planning or project process, and extends through to implementation, and even to monitoring and evaluation.

It is essential, though, that citizens who want to be involved also understand the role that they may play in the agency's planning and implementation process. They may frequently have a very important impact, but usually the agency cannot simply turn over decision-making to them.

**Collaborative Stewardship** is the concept that is emerging from the cooperative relationship that has developed between local community people and public land manager in many communities. It can happen in your community too. It is a shared decision-making process in which the local community people collaborate with the agency to plan for and implement the federal agency's program, taking consideration of all goals and objectives, interests, guidelines, and scientific principles.

**Figure 1  
The Dilemma of the  
National Forest Manager**



**Figure 2  
And How Collaborative  
Stewardship can Help**

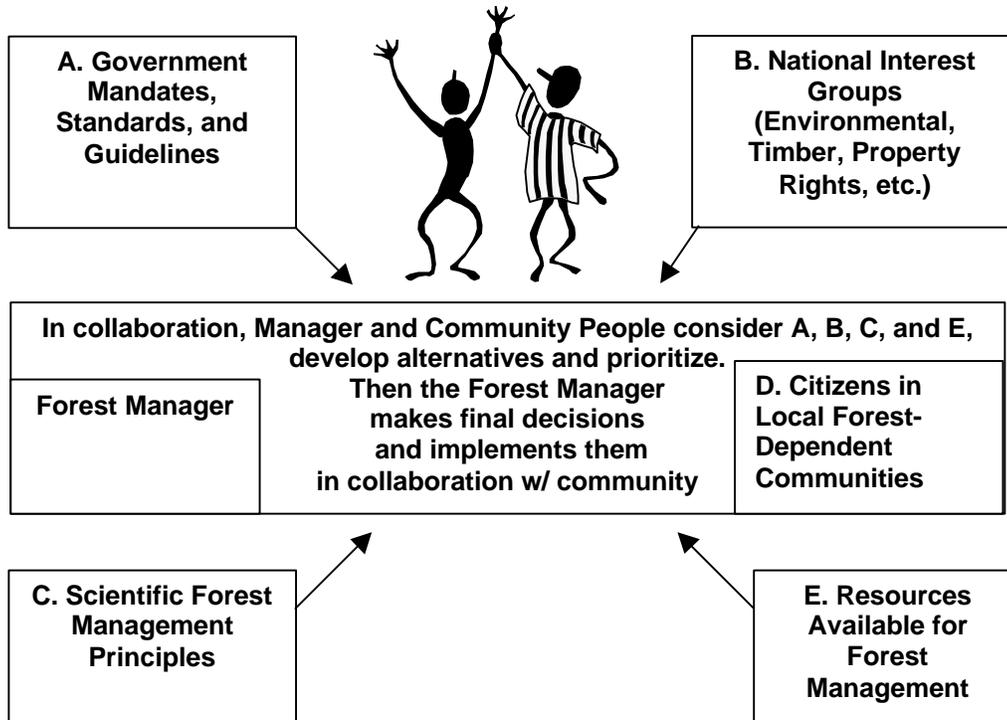
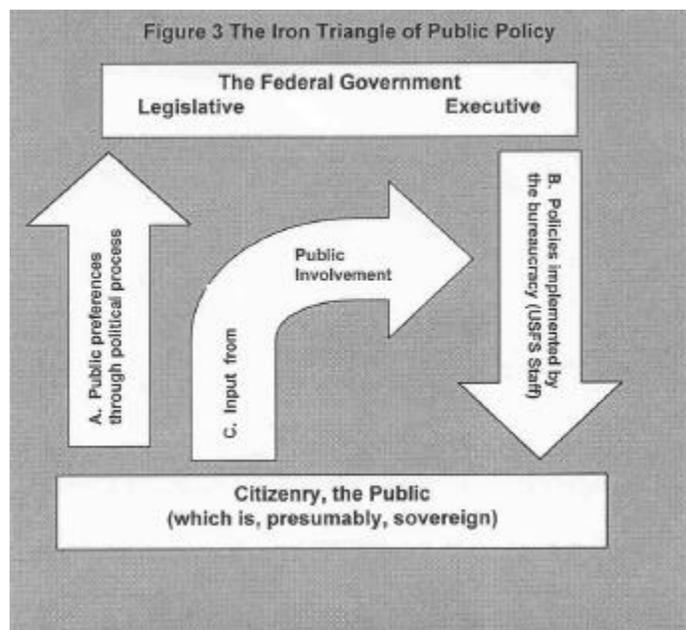


Figure 3 illustrates the "Iron Triangle of Public Policy" as it relates to public input obtained by U. S. Forest Service professionals during the planning process. Overall policy for forest management is federal policy, and is made through the normal political process, represented by the arrow A, and then is supposed to be implemented by the USDA Forest Service bureaucracy through arrow B. However, "Administration Participation" both requires and allows that affected publics have an opportunity to participate, introducing arrow C, as a means whereby they may have an impact upon how the bureaucracy implements policy.

However, administrative participation (arrow C) does not take the place of Arrows A and B, it can only supplement them. Hence, the input obtained from C must be balanced with broad, national policy obtained through A. The USDA Forest Service has the responsibility of trying to achieve



the proper balance of these two, as well as bringing into consideration relevant professional and scientific forest management principles.

Unfortunately, federal legislation does not provide much help to the USDA Forest Service as to how, exactly, input from Arrow C is to be treated, it only orders that it be obtained. Limitations imposed by something called the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) severely limits the extent to which USDA Forest Service professionals may use input obtained from organized citizen groups. Regulations of the Office of Management and Budget make it almost impossible for the USDA Forest Service to carry out formal surveys of public opinion.

However, community leaders who want to play a role, and are willing to adopt the logic of Figure 2, will often find that it is possible to have a significant impact upon the forest planning process through collaboration.

This is one of a set of **COMMUNITY GUIDES FOR FOREST PLANNING** designed to help community leaders and community groups participate effectively in the up-coming USDA National Forest Plan Revision process. The entire series includes:

**Guide 1:** Who is Responsible for Public Lands, Natural Resources, and Environmental Issues (in process)

**Guide 2:** A Guide to National Forest Planning and Management (available)

**Guide 3:** Public Involvement and "Participatory Management" in National Forest Planning and Decisionmaking

**Guide 4:** Summary of the Ouachita National Forest Long-Range Plan of 1990 (in process)

**Guide 5:** Summary of the Ozark/St. Francis National Forest Long-Range Plan of 1986 (in process)

**Guide 6:** Building Common Ground in Your Community (available)