

# **CHALLENGE OPPORTUNITY/RESPONSIBILITY FOR COMMUNITIES NEAR NATIONAL FORESTS**

## **COMMUNITY GUIDE NO. 2 National Forest Planning and Management**

This guide is about how you and your community can, in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, influence the future management of the National Forest in your area as well as the future of your own community.

Local communities like yours are increasingly taking responsibility for their own well-being and future. Some have launched their own economic development programs; some have started innovative education and training programs; some are taking responsibility for welfare reform; and some find themselves taking on controversial issues concerning growth and development, water and air quality, and other environmental issues. Communities that are closely associated with the National Forests face a special challenge and opportunity as the managers of the National Forests in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Missouri, begin to update their long-range management plans. The USDA Forest Service, which is responsible for management of these 4.5 million acres of public land, will be seeking public input into the process, as required by law. However, the real challenge for the USDA Forest Service and "its" rural communities is to go beyond mere "public input" to the development of partnerships with local communities. The long-range plan that emerges can truly be the "people's plan." At the same time, communities may take this opportunity to plan for their own futures, perhaps even with assistance from the Forest Service and other agencies.

This guide will help you to learn more about the USDA Forest Service; how its planning process works; how you and your community can participate in the planning process, and how you and your community can use Forest Planning to stimulate a serious planning process in your own community.

### **Importance of Forest Lands to Arkansas Communities**

Forest resources are important to many Arkansas communities. Many still depend quite heavily upon timber products and/or forest-based recreation and tourism or other forest-based activities, or they simply find the Forest to be a valuable feature of their environment, allowing hunting, hiking, and a wide range of other outdoor activities. The National Forests provide clean water, high-quality environments for outdoor recreation, abundant fish and wildlife, supplies of wood and paper products, wildernesses and wild and scenic rivers, energy and mineral supplies, and forage for grazing livestock. National Forests contribute to the social and economic well-being of Arkansans in many ways, including creating jobs and providing revenues to maintain healthier local and state economies. The mix of environmental conditions and human uses provided by each National Forest varies considerably. Moreover, much of the struggle over management direction for these public lands revolves around finding the appropriate or best mix of desired conditions and uses.

Although national forest management decisions are usually made after consideration of public input, many feel that such input mainly comes from regional and national environmental and trade (e.g., timber, cattle, outdoor recreation) organizations, rather than local community members. This is unfortunate, since local communities can play a very positive role in promoting individual and collective stewardship of a community's natural resources, including public lands. Communities can also play a role in mediating conflicts, which have often weighed down the forest planning process in the past.

It's your community . . . it's your forest. Get involved. Use this guide to learn about what's included in a Forest Plan. Find out how the participatory management process works. Learn the steps necessary to become involved with your Forest Service personnel and then use this new knowledge and skill to participate in other community planning projects.

### What is a Forest Plan?

The Forest Service, a branch of the U. S. Department of Agriculture, is charged with managing 191 million acres of public lands, including the three National Forests in the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands region: the Mark Twain in Missouri, the Ozark-St. Francis in Arkansas, and the Ouachita in Arkansas and Oklahoma. All of our National Forests are required by law to have Land and Resource Management Plans or "Forest Plans" in place, and to revise these plans every 10 to 15 years. The Forest Service issued the first plans for the three forests in the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands Region in 1986 and is initiating revisions of these plans in 2002.

**Two levels of planning.** —The National Forests plan at two levels. Their long-range plans (**Forest Plans**), which lay out the general direction for forest management, are revised every 10 to 15 years. The **Project Planning** process applies to day-to-day management of the National Forests, and results in decisions to build facilities or trails, conduct timber sales or prescribed burns, etc. Both levels of planning provide opportunities for input from citizens and local communities.

So what is a Forest Plan? A Forest Plan describes what the National Forest should be like in ten years, what uses can be accommodated and what conditions should be maintained or restored. The Plan also describes activities for achieving these objectives. National laws, regulations and policies provide general guidelines (e.g, see <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/index2.html>). Forest Plans describe how these laws and policies are to be fulfilled on a particular national forest. Among other things, the Plan (1) sets the goals and objectives for the various uses of the forest, (2) sets various forest-wide standards and guidelines, (3) defines the way the forest land will be divided up into areas for management purposes, (4) estimates the maximum sustainable timber harvest that is possible, (5) and outlines the monitoring and evaluation that will be required.

### What Can Local Community People Do to play a role in Forest plan revision?

- Become involved as early as possible in the forest planning process
- Get on USFS Mailing Lists
- Obtain Citizen Participation Plans, even get involved in developing them with forest
- Support innovative forest managers' efforts to involve the public
- Engage local government if possible
- Insist upon an open, inclusive process— seek to build "common ground"
- Empower a local leadership group
- Organize study group, or "sustainable community" effort
- Appeal USFS decisions, either internally through administrative appeals or through the courts.
- Obtain Guide 3, Public Involvement and "Participatory Management" in National Forest Planning and Decisionmaking" and become familiar with the roles that citizens can plan in the plan revision process.

The Forest Plan provides broad guidance; it does not make decisions about particular sites, stands, roads, trails, etc. Those decisions are made later in a site-specific Project Planning process in compliance with the goals, guidelines, and standards of the established Plan. As in the Forest Plan revision process, citizens are also given opportunities to influence the project decision process.

Primary responsibility for developing or revising the Plan rests with a Responsible Official (a Regional Forester) and his/or her Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team), which typically consists of USDA Forest Service professionals, including foresters, wildlife biologists, recreation planners, soil scientists and other specialists. The team works closely with other agencies and consults with interested citizens throughout the process. The ID team is supposed to use the best available information and expertise to identify the most important issues and develop various management alternatives in response to those issues. Although, by law, the ID Team is made up of USDA Forest Service professionals and other Federal employees, citizens can and should have input concerning which issues and alternatives to emphasize, among other things. Public involvement is required during several steps of the

planning process. Novel public involvement processes are encouraged and are being used by some National Forests to create opportunities for citizens to play a role in the work of the ID Teams. Unfortunately Forest Service staff resources are extremely limited, and public involvement takes time—lots of time. That is where communities and community groups can pitch in and help.

**An Example: The Forest Plan for the Ouachita National Forest**

The current plan for the Ouachita National Forest was adopted in 1986, but soon thereafter went through a major amendment, which was completed in 1990. The result is a document of more than 350 pages with maps (Amended Land and resource Management Plan: Ouachita National Forest, Vol. I), supported by its Final Environmental Impact Statement (Vol. II), more than 400 pages, Comment Letters and Responses to the Final Impact Statement (Vol. III) of about 350 pages, and, finally, a summary of the Final Impact Statement \ of about 21 pages.

This plan “ provides two levels of direction: general Forest-wide management direction and specific direction for each management area. Management area direction is described in terms of the management goals and objectives, desired future condition, Forest standards and guidelines and management area direction. The Forest Plan also specifies monitoring and evaluation.”

The planning process is the Ouachita National Forest has been very dynamic since 1990. There have been 32 additional amendments since the 1990 significant plan amendment. **Hence, community folks who want to learn about specific aspects of the plan currently in effect must be sure that they have not only the original, amended, planning document, but also all of the amendments.**

[http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/design\\_planning.html](http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/design_planning.html).

Additional details about the Ouachita National Forest's Plan are found in Guide 4, and for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest's Plan in Guide 5. The plan currently in effect for the Ozark-St. Francis National Forest is available at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/oonf/ozark/>.

The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) spells out six questions to be answered in the Forest Plan, as follows:

- What are the Goals of Forest Management? -- Federal law requires that our National Forest be managed for multiple uses. These uses are outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, wildlife and fish (Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act of 1960). The Plan further defines the goals with respect to these different uses for the particular National Forest by Management Area.
- What Standards and Guidelines are to be followed in managing the Forest? --The Plan identifies and defines both Forest-wide and Management Area-specific standards and guidelines that will be used in future, site-specific forest management actions. For example, most plans include specific standards for protecting streams and lakes from excess sediment and pollution.
- How will the Forest be divided into Management Areas? --The Plan identifies how the Forest will be divided geographically into Management Areas, what types of Management Areas will be identified, and how the respective areas will be managed.
- What Areas are Suitable for Timber Production? - -The Plan identifies which areas and how many acres are suitable for timber production. Suitability is based on criteria such as slope, productivity and availability (Wilderness is not “available” and, therefore, is “unsuitable”).

- What is the maximum amount of timber that could be produced sustainably? --The Plan identifies the maximum amount of timber that could be harvested from the entire forest on a sustained basis (This is called the Allowable Sale Quantity, or ASQ).
- What about Roadless Areas? --The Plan must address which roadless areas, if any, should be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation (Congress alone can designate Federal Wilderness). It must also address the proposed uses for roadless areas that are not recommended for Wilderness designation

**What's New in Forest Planning** The original planning regulations were issues in 1982 and, after a long process of review and analysis, a new set of regulations was issued on Nov. 9, 2000 (36 CFR Part 219,). However, these new regulations will likely be modified during 2002 or 2003 (see website below).The 2000 planning regulations emphasized four key concepts: (1) sustainability as the overall goal for forest management, including ecological, social and economic aspects of sustainability, (2) extensive collaboration with the public, (3) effective integration of science into planning and management, and (4) reduction in some of the extensive analyses required by the original plan. For the time being, forest plan revisions in Arkansas and Oklahoma will follow the 1982 planning regulations (available on-line at <http://www.fs.fed.us/emc/nfma/index2.html>), The current status of the new regulations is described at <http://www.fs.fed.us/forum/nepa/nfslandandrescmgtplanning.html>.

## Opportunities for Public Involvement in Forest- and Project-Level Planning

**Table 6. Opportunities for Public Involvement in the Forest Planning Process**

<b>Long Range Planning (Forest Plan)</b>	<b>Project Planning</b>
<p><b>Pre-Planning Stage</b>  <b>A formal Regional Assessment is an option.</b> In it the Forest Service and cooperators compile an information base on social, economic, biological and physical conditions across a broad area to provide context for the analysis of needed changes.<sup>1</sup> Forest Service also reviews the results of public involvement efforts and new laws and regulations to determine “need for change.” A public announcement is mailed to all interested citizens and groups, and subsequent public discussions are held. A draft public involvement plan is developed for public review. Following this, a formal notice of the assessment is published in the Federal Register, and a summary of comments on the draft public involvement plan is sent out, including Forest Service responses to the comments.</p>	<p><b>Pre-proposal Stage</b>            Forest Service identifies possible projects by comparing existing forest conditions with goals, objectives, and desired future conditions specified by the forest plan. Although public involvement is not required, it can be used, and the public is generally encouraged to submit comments and feedback at any time. In many cases projects may actually be developed in close collaboration with community groups, trail associations, etc.</p>
<p><b>Preparation and Publication of Citizen Participation Plan</b></p>	<p><b>Preparation and Publication of Citizen Participation Plan</b></p>
<p><b>Scoping</b>            Forest Service provides the public with a <b>notice of intent to conduct the forest plan revision or amendment and formulates a public involvement plan.</b>            Forest Service identifies changes needed based upon input from the public, other federal agencies, and State and local governments.            Forest Service <b>provides proposed action to amend or revise the plan to public for comment.</b> Significant issues related to proposed Plan are identified from public input.</p>	<p><b>Scoping</b>            Every three months the Forest Supervisor <b>sends out a list of proposed projects</b> to people who have expressed interest in Forest Service activities (and posts the list on a website). Detailed <b>scoping notices about specific project are sent</b> to people who are known to have an interest. From the response received to these scoping notices, <b>significant issues are identified.</b></p>
<p><b>Development of Alternatives and Analysis of Effects</b>            Forest Service ID Team formulates alternatives in response to issues that have been identified.  <b>A draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) are prepared and made available for public comment for at least 90 days.</b>            Forest Supervisor <b>conducts public involvement activities</b> to obtain comment on the draft Plan and EIS.</p>	<p><b>Development of Alternatives and Analysis of Effects</b>            Based upon its analysis and public response, the Forest Service <b>notifies the public either (1) that the project is routine</b>, will have little or no environmental significance and either issues a categorical exclusion or a decision notice, or <b>(2) that the project’s environmental significance is unknown</b>, so that an <b>Environmental Assessment (EA)</b> will be done. If the EA determines that the environmental effects are not significant, the Forest Service issues a <b>Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)</b> and a decision notice, both of which are sent to those who commented during scoping or the EA review period. If the EA determines that the effects are significant, FS issues a public notice of intent to prepare an <b>Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)</b>. A draft EIS is prepared and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) publishes a notice of the draft EIS. <b>The public has at least 45 days to comment.</b> The final EIS is sent to interested and affected parties and filed with the EPA. <b>The public then has at least 30 days to comment</b> on the final EIS.</p>
<p><b>Decision Process</b>            Forest Service analyzes public comments on the draft EIS and recommends the final Forest Plan to the Regional Forester. The Regional Forester approves the Plan and EIS in a Record of Decision (ROD). <b>The ROD can be appealed by anyone within 90 days</b> of its approval by the Regional Forester. Further challenge to the Forest Plan can be pursued through the courts</p>	<p><b>Decision Process</b>            The Forest Service issues a decision notice) to the public and keeps the public informed of progress on the project. At this point <b>the public can contest the decisions through the administrative appeals process.</b> A notice of decision subject to appeal is published in local newspapers. After the period for appeals has ended, the public can pursue legal issues through the courts.</p>
<p><b>Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Plan</b></p>	<p><b>Implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the project</b></p>

## **How can Communities Be Involved in this Planning Process?**

In spite of prominent commitments to involving the public extensively and at all possible points in the long range and project planning process, both the complexity and rigidity of the Forest planning process seem to make it almost incomprehensible. This has the unfortunate effect that only those who can afford highly concentrated effort by professionals--or by citizens who have made themselves into professional--are able to have an influence. It also makes it almost impossible to see how existing community plans, planning processes, and community concerns and preferences could be incorporated into the forest planning process, in spite of requirements that this be done.

The ambiguity of the public involvement mandate in the USDA Forest Service planning process is both an advantage and a disadvantage. Because of it, innovative and creative forest managers can involve citizens extensively, whereas insecure and fearful ones might do almost nothing. Citizens and community groups that understand this can have a very important impact by working closely with their forest managers, giving positive support to creativity when it occurs. Rural, forest-dependent communities should consider the following:

**Seek Involvement Early in the Process**—Communities should be prepared to make full use of the public involvement opportunities accorded by the NEPA process as outlined in Table 6. They are more likely to be successful if they become involved early in the process rather than later, despite the process appearing to be focused upon involvement later rather than earlier (commenting upon FS proposals, rather than being involved in preparing them, for example.)

**Get on Mailing Lists**—The most common form of public involvement used by the Forest Service is announcements and information mailed to lists of interested persons and agencies. The first thing community groups should do is to be sure that they regularly receive these mailings.

**Citizen Involvement Plans**—The USDA Forest Service is required to prepare and publish a ‘Citizen Involvement’ plan for all of its planning processes. Community groups should obtain these plans as early as possible. They should be prepared to comment upon the plans and try to persuade those responsible to amend them to provide greater opportunity for input if necessary. Indeed, they might even offer to assist the forest managers in designing the citizen involvement plans themselves. Perhaps some formal responsibility ought to be allocated specifically for this purpose in the community.

**Support Innovative Forest Managers.**—Community groups should take the initiative to develop their own sets of issues, priorities, and Desired Future Condition (DFC) statements and to support national forest managers who are willing to try innovative methods of public involvement. Local community groups’ offers to share at least some responsibility for public involvement may be the determining factor for a Forest Manager. When opportunity for public input presents itself, the community will be prepared to do so in a consistent manner based upon at least some community support, if not consensus. Hence, forest-dependent communities ought to do some strategic planning now in anticipation of up-coming forest plan revision.

**Engage Local Governments**— The regulations for implementing the National Forest Management Act of 1976 state that the Forest Service “shall coordinate regional and national forest planning with the equivalent and related planning efforts of other Federal agencies, State and local governments, and Indian tribes” (36 CFR 219). Although local governments have not played much of a role in the past, they are emerging in many communities as an instrument for articulating the concerns, interests, and priorities of local community people in both long-range and project planning. Because of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), the USDA Forest Service is not free to organize or to use ad hoc local advisory committees. These restrictions of FACA do not apply to Local governments, so they may serve to represent local community people in the Forest planning process.

**Open and Inclusive Processes, Even if it Means Conflict.**—Community-based involvement efforts must be open and inclusive, as undesirable and uncomfortable as this may seem at first. Building

common ground is difficult work, but there is almost always some common ground to be found. Communities in which contending factions each attempt to influence the Forest Service in the direction of their own, unique priorities—priorities which are frequently actually set by outside ideological or political forces—literally force Forest Service decision-makers to make key decisions on their own, and create situations in which everyone loses, everyone is angry, and the advantage that might have been gained from emphasizing what is common is jeopardized. Planning Guide 6 goes into more detail on how communities can try to "Build Common Ground."

**Identify and Empower a Responsible Leadership Group**—Identifying a small group of local leaders who are willing to represent the community can be advantageous. To be effective such a leadership group must be able to represent the range of views and opinions that exist in the community. Without an open, inclusive process open to the road array of views and opinions in the community, their input may not be meaningful to the Forest Service planning process.

**Organize Study Groups and/or "Sustainable Community" Efforts**—Many forest managers are linking with various partners in the local communities well before planning occurs through intensive study groups of local community citizens and leaders. These groups can help citizens become better informed about natural resource and forest management issues. Most importantly, they can provide carefully considered input into the forest planning process.

**Appeals**—Of course, one of the most common actual forms of public participation is by appealing decisions once they are made. There are two kinds of appeals, internal, administrative appeals within the USDA Forest Service and externally-initiated litigation which appeals decisions through the courts. [More]

## Glossary of Terms

**Alternative:** One of several policies, plans, or projects proposed for decisionmaking.

**Desired Future Condition (DFC):** A statement of conditions or qualities to be achieved over time (for example, the desired recreational opportunities available on a particular national forest).

**Environmental analysis:** An analysis of alternative actions and their predictable short and long-term environmental effects, which include physical, biological, economic, social and environmental design factors and their interaction. (36 CFR 219.3)

**Environmental Assessment (EA):** Document that discloses the results of an environmental analysis for proposed actions that are not categorically excluded from documentation and for which the need for an environmental impact statement has not been determined.

**Environmental Impact Statement (EIS):** The statement of environmental effects required for major federal actions under Section 102 of the National Environmental Policy Act and released to the public and other agencies for comment and review.

**Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA):** Law Congress passed in 1972 to regulate the numerous committees, boards, commissions, councils, and similar groups that have been established to advise officers and agencies in the executive branch of the federal government.

**Forest Plan:** See **National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan**

**Interdisciplinary team (ID Team):** Collective participation of two or more disciplines, or fields of specialized technical knowledge for natural resources management.

**Inventoried Roadless Areas.** Areas identified in a set of inventoried roadless area maps, contained in Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Volume 2, dated November 2000; these areas meet (or at one time met) regional criteria for "roadless areas."

**Management area:** An area with similar management objectives and a common management prescription. The Ouachita National Forest's 1990 Forest Plan, for example, identified 20 different Management Areas. A major portion of the Plan is dedicated to detailed descriptions of each of these Management Areas, definition of their Desired Future Condition, a listing of Management

Area Prescription Goals, followed by highly specified “Proposed and Probable Practices, Standards, and Guidelines” which apply to the Management Area.

**Management direction:** A statement of multiple use and other goals and objectives, the associated management prescriptions, and standards and guidelines for attaining them. (36 CFR 219.3)

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** An Act, to declare a National policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality.

**National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan:** A plan developed to meet the requirements of the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended, that guides all natural resource management activities and establishes management standards and guidelines for the National Forest System lands of a given National Forest.

**National Forest Management Act (NFMA):** A law passed in 1976 amending the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act that requires the preparation of Regional and Forest Plans and regulations to guide that development.

**Proposed action:** In terms of the National Environmental Policy Act, the project, activity or decision that a federal agency intends to implement or undertake, which is the subject of an environmental impact statement.

**Responsible Line Officer:** For land management planning purposes, the Forest Service employee who has been delegated the authority to carry out a specific planning action. (36 CFR 219.3)

**Participatory Management:** A pattern of public administration in which government officials are required to involve affected citizens in planning for, administration, and management of the programs for which the officials are responsible.

**Record of Decision:** The formal documentation of a final decision for which an environmental impact statement has been prepared.

**Wilderness:** Area designated by congressional action under one of the various Wilderness Acts. Wilderness is defined as undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence without permanent improvements or human habitation. Wilderness areas are protected and managed to preserve their natural conditions, which generally appear to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature with the imprint of human activity substantially unnoticeable; have outstanding opportunities for solitude or for a primitive and confined type of recreation; include at least 5,000 acres or are of sufficient size to make practical their preservation, enjoyment, and use in an unimpaired condition; and may contain features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value as well as ecologic and geologic interest.

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

**Guide 3:** Public Involvement and “Participatory Management” in National Forest Planning and Decisionmaking (available)

**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)

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<sup>i</sup> In 2000 the three National Forests in the Ozark-Ouachita Highlands region cooperated in performing the Ozark/Ouachita Highlands Assessment. Information from this Assessment will be used in the plan revision process