

NEWS RELEASE

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Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth Forests Set a Course For the Future

Twin Falls, Boise, McCall, Idaho ... The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup (Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth Forests) has completed their revised Land Management Plans and the accompanying Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The three Forests reach a milestone with the release of the revised Plans, which establish an emphasis for managing the 6.6 million administered acres found in southern and central Idaho and northern Utah for the next 10-15 years.

Forest Plans set the course for future management of publicly owned lands. They are programmatic (broad) in nature and while they do not make site-specific decisions they provide a path for all individual projects to follow. The revised management direction responds to new initiatives such as the National Fire Plan and Healthy Forest Initiative and concerns about listed species, habitat restoration, and commodity production. The revised Plans also make individual decisions for managing roadless areas, recognize the importance of healthy watersheds, and address the need to reduce hazardous fuels to prevent wildfire in areas where life and property are considered at risk.

The original Forest Plans were developed in 1987, 1988, and 1990 for the Sawtooth, Payette, and Boise Forests respectively. The revised Forest Plans are different than the original Plans in several ways. Particularly, the revised Plans emphasize restoration or maintenance of vegetation and watershed conditions and focus on the condition of the forests rather than what they can produce. The revised direction is similar to the original direction in that it continues to provide for commodities including recreation, timber harvest, and grazing.

Overall, most people won't notice an immediate change when the Forest's implement the revised management direction. One area where people might notice an immediate change is if their favorite recreation or hunting sites are temporarily impacted while restoration activities are taking place, such as prescribed fire or mechanical treatments.

"Managing and protecting the natural resources on the 6.6 million acres administered by the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup to meet the needs and desire of the public and affected Tribes for today and into the future, while at the same time meet the needs of the resources, is very complex and demanding," said Ruth Monahan, Sawtooth Forest Supervisor. "We ask people to be patient, changes will not occur overnight and it will take time, years in many cases, to see the results. We will also need to amend or update the plans periodically and ask your input and involvement in helping to correct problems when they are identified."

"We realize that the decisions being made for future management of the three Forests will not please everyone on every topic. However, we request that you take a close look at either an entire Forest or all three Forest Plans and consider the full mix of opportunities and uses, keeping in mind the laws that we must uphold," said Mark Madrid, Payette Forest Supervisor. "We truly believe that in ten or twenty years people will be able to look back and see improvements to the land, resources, recreation and commodity opportunities."

The Forests received over 3,000 comments from people interested in the Plan Revision effort. Many of these comments came from people concerned about access and travel management. While the revised Plans do not actually make decisions concerning specific roads and trails they do build the foundation for beginning travel planning sometime in the near future.

"There have been a lot of people, agencies, and organizations involved throughout this 7-year project who provided considerable input on a wide range of topics," said Dick Smith, Boise Forest Supervisor. "Their involvement and comments helped shape these plans and we appreciate the support and input they provided. Our goal is to continue protecting and managing the land, so everyone can use and enjoy it for centuries to come."

The revised documents will be available on compact disk and electronically on Thursday, July 31 at www.fs.fed.us/r4/sawtooth. Documents will be available at all Forest Service offices within the Ecogroup by August 8, 2003.

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