



In the Public's Eye, How are We Doing?

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is twofold: (1) caring for the land, and (2) serving people. Because personal satisfaction is an individual concept having multiple facets, providing high-quality customer service and achieving high levels of customer satisfaction can be as challenging as managing for healthy ecosystems. A person's attitudes about the Forest Service are often influenced by the nature and outcomes of his or her interactions with Agency employees, and by their attitudes about how and toward what end the Forest Service manages public lands. Understanding the public's objectives and comparing them with the Agency's objectives can provide useful input to the strategic planning process.

A new report, published by the Rocky Mountain Research Station and titled *Survey Responses from the Intermountain West: Are We Achieving the Public's Objectives for Forests and Grasslands?* (General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-160), describes the public's values, objectives, beliefs, and attitudes for and toward the USDA Forest Service, with particular focus on the Intermountain West region. Information on the public's perceptions has been collected through an ongoing survey entitled "The American Public's Values, Objectives, Beliefs, and Attitudes Regarding Forests and Rangelands" (hereafter VOBA). The VOBA survey asked respondents about their environmental values as they relate to public lands, their objectives

for the management of forests and rangelands in general as well as those managed by the Forest Service, their beliefs about whether it is the role of the Forest Service to fulfill these objectives, and their attitudes about the performance of the Agency in fulfilling their objectives.



The survey was implemented as a module of the National Survey on Recreation and the Environment. The VOBA part of the survey is comprised of statements to which respondents indicate their level of agreement or approval in four areas: values, objectives, beliefs, and attitudes regarding forests and rangelands. Respondents indicated their agreement or approval on a five-point scale, with 1 being not at all important and 5

Focus

The report focuses on the Intermountain West region of the United States: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. “These states share a number of characteristics and are facing similar economic and social transitions,” says Deborah Shields, Minerals Economist with the Rocky Mountain Research Station, and a coauthor of the report.

“One of the most important similarities within the Intermountain West is the extent of public lands within these states, which are changing from the so-called ‘Old West’ to the ‘New West,’ a transition marked by the traditional extractive economy (mining, logging, and ranching) to the service sector (everything from tourism to telecommuting professionals). Despite these changes, in fact possibly due to these changes, there is an enduring regional trait, a ‘Code of the West’ – a way of thinking and living that differs from other regions of the United States,” says Shields. Included within this region’s identity is a history of self-sufficiency through cooperation, exemplified by actions such as the Sagebrush Rebellion. These traits unite the states of the Intermountain West, and distinguish the region from the rest of the United States. Thus, by treating these states as one region, it is possible to shed light on how this distinct public segment perceives values, objectives, beliefs, and attitudes



Survey Results

Watershed Protection – The VOBA objective deemed the most important by respondents is the conservation and protection of lands that are the source of our water resources. This objective has a mean of 4.69. The mean of 4.44 for the corresponding belief statement also indicates that the public considers the protection of watersheds to be an appropriate role for the Forest Service. Agency performance is viewed as somewhat favorable, with a mean of 3.76.

Volunteer Programs – Developing volunteer programs to improve the health of forests and grasslands had the second highest importance rating, with a mean of 4.60. Respondents saw the development of such volunteer programs as an appropriate role for the Agency (mean 4.42). While the majority of respondents view Agency performance as adequate, 80 percent feel that the Agency could be doing a better job.

Recreation Concerns – The public sees distribution of information about recreation concerns as very important, with a mean of 4.57. The distribution of this type of information is also viewed as an appropriate role for the Agency (mean 4.44). Only a small number of respondents rate the performance of the Forest Service as unfavorable.

Diverse Uses – Allowing for diverse uses is seen as an important objective by most respondents (mean 4.21). As with the distribution of recreation information, respondents see this as an appropriate role for the Forest Service (mean 4.10). Agency performance is viewed as somewhat favorable, with a mean of 3.59. More than 75 percent felt that the Agency could be doing a better job.

Other important objectives with more diverse responses include: protection of ecosystems, with a mean of 4.32; making decisions locally (mean 4.31); developing volunteer programs for maintenance and other facility improvements (mean 4.16); informing the public on the economic value received by developing our natural resources (mean 4.01); the need for national level guidance when managing the development of natural resources (mean 4.16); and preserving the wilderness experience on forests and grasslands (mean 4.03).

Objectives that were rated somewhat important or neutral include: resource extraction and use (including the preservation of natural resources of forests and grasslands through policies that end timber harvesting and mining; the preservation of cultural uses by Native Americans and Hispanics; wilderness designation; providing natural resources for community economies; restricting mineral development; and restricting timber harvesting and grazing); public input and information (recreation development, law enforcement on public lands; designated trails; and entry fees); and land acquisition.

Objectives that were rated not important (mean of less than 3.00) include: access for motorized recreation; expanding commercial recreation;

Table 8: Comparison of core objective objectives, beliefs, and attitudes between Intermountain West and the rest of the United States.

| OBJECTIVE | Do you believe that achieving this objective is an appropriate role for the Forest Service in implementing this objective? (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) | | | How strongly do you value the performance of the USDA Forest Service in achieving this objective? (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree) | | | | | |
|--|--|------------------------|-----------------------|---|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|----|
| | Intermountain West | Rest of US | Sig. diff. (Wilcoxon) | Intermountain West | Rest of US | Sig. diff. (Wilcoxon) | | | |
| Conserving and protecting forests and grasslands that are the source of our water resources, such as streams, lakes, and watersheds areas. | 4.69 (.07) (.07) | 4.72 (.07) (.07) | | 4.44 (.12) (.12) | 4.61 (.08) (.08) | ** | 3.76 (.12) (.12) | 3.84 (.10) (.10) | |
| Developing volunteer programs to improve forests and grasslands (for example, planting trees, or improving water quality). | 4.69 (.07) (.07) | 4.73 (.07) (.07) | | 4.42 (.12) (.12) | 4.51 (.08) (.08) | | 3.41 (.12) (.12) | 3.54 (.10) (.10) | ** |
| Informing the public about recreation concerns on forests and grasslands such as safety, trail etiquette, and respect for wildlife. | 4.57 (.07) (.07) | 4.57 (.07) (.07) | | 4.44 (.12) (.12) | 4.51 (.08) (.08) | | 3.63 (.12) (.12) | 3.19 (.17) (.17) | ** |
| Allowing for diverse uses of forests and grasslands such as grazing, recreation, and wildlife habitat. | 4.21 (.07) (.07) | 4.24 (.07) (.07) | | 4.10 (.12) (.12) | 4.05 (.08) (.08) | | 3.29 (.12) (.12) | 3.28 (.10) (.10) | |

* Denotes significance
 ** Significant difference in confidence intervals at .05, .01, and .001, respectively for Wilcoxon test.

Comparison

The report also compares the VOBA results for the Intermountain West with the results for the rest of the United States (Table 8). “The Intermountain West does not differ significantly from the rest of the United States regarding the importance of any of the ‘core’ objectives,” says Shields. “It does differ, however, in that it believes the role of the Forest Service in implementing the top core objective, ‘conserving and protecting forests and grasslands that are the source of our water resources,’ is less appropriate than does the rest of the United States,” she said.

Looking at other core objectives, the Intermountain West residents rate Agency performance for developing volunteer programs to improve forests and grasslands lower, although still somewhat favorably, than does the rest of the United States. The same is true for informing the public about recreation concerns on forests and grasslands.

Protecting ecosystems and wildlife habitat, informing the public on the potential environmental impacts, and preserving the ability to have a wilderness experience are all less important to residents of the Intermountain West. In contrast, the issue of making local management decisions is more important to the Intermountain West than the rest of the United States.

You can find more information about the data and methodology used in the survey, and additional results in *Survey Responses from the Intermountain West: Are We Achieving the Public’s Objectives for Forests and Rangelands*, General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-160, available in hardcopy from the Rocky Mountain Research Station, and in downloadable PDF format on the Stations’ Internet website at <http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/>



Publication Reviews

Strategies for Monitoring Terrestrial Animals and Habitats (RMRS-GTR-161)

This report addresses monitoring strategies for terrestrial animals and habitats. It focuses on monitoring associated with National Forest Management Act planning and is intended to apply primarily to monitoring efforts that are broader than individual National Forests. Primary topics covered are monitoring requirements; ongoing monitoring programs; key monitoring questions and measures; balancing three necessary and complementary forms of monitoring (targeted, cause-and-effect, and context); sampling design and statistical considerations; use of the data that result from monitoring; and organizational and operational considerations in the development and implementation of monitoring programs. It concludes with a series of recommendations for the ongoing improvement of monitoring of terrestrial animals and their habitat. General Technical Report RMRS-GTR-161 is available from the Rocky Mountain Research Station or on-line at http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs/rmrs_gtr161.

Measuring Landscape Esthetics: the Scenic Beauty Estimation Method (RMRS-RP-167)

The Scenic Beauty Estimation Method (SBE) provides quantitative measures of esthetic preferences for alternative wildland management systems. Extensive experimentation and testing with user, interest, and professional groups validated the method. SBE shows promise as an efficient and objective means for assessing the scenic beauty of public forests and wildlands, and also for predicting the esthetic consequences of alternative land uses. Extensions and modifications of the basic methodology offer potentially useful design, planning, and management tools. Research Paper RMRS-RP-167 is available from the Rocky Mountain Research Station or online at http://www.fs.fed.us/rm/pubs_rm/rm_rp167.html.

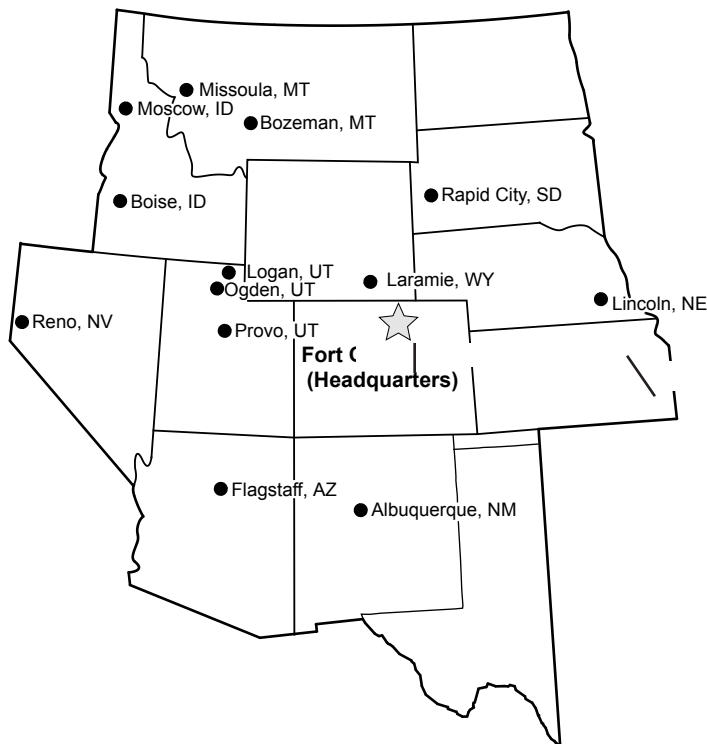
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