

# FOREST PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT FOR FISCAL YEARS 1993 AND 1994

## Kootenai National Forest

We have recently completed the monitoring of Forest Plan implementation for fiscal years 1993 and 1994. Our monitoring and evaluation process is shown in Chapter IV of the 1987 Kootenai National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). In FY 1993 and 1994 we monitored 17 items (13 are items to be reported yearly, five are items to be reported every two years). The FY 1993-1994 report identifies similar trends as those items reported in the five year monitoring report. Following this summary is a more in-depth review of those items. In this summary, there is a section explaining the Forest Plan itself, the monitoring methods, and evaluation of seven years of monitoring practices, standards, and outputs under the Forest Plan.

## FOREST PLAN DECISIONS

The Forest Plan is a set of decisions that guide management of the forest. Taken broadly, it contains three types of decisions:

- 1) Goals, Objectives, and Desired Conditions (pages II-1 through II-17 of the Plan) provide general direction regarding where we should be headed as we put the Plan into practice.
- 2) Standards (Pages II-20 through II-33, Chapter III of the Plan, and Forest Plan amendments) tell us how to put the plan into practice, or give us conditions we must meet while we implement the plan.
- 3) Land Allocation - Management areas (MAs), as described in the Forest Plan Chapter III and displayed on the Forest Plan Map, are those areas of the Forest which are allocated for different types of land management and resource production.

## MONITORING METHODS

Chapter IV of the Forest Plan contains a detailed process that was designed to monitor implementation of the decisions discussed above. Are we doing what the Plan envisioned? Are we seeing the effects and outputs predicted in the Plan? Are the standards working, do we need to adjust practices to meet the standards? Does the monitoring process need adjusting?

## SUMMARY OF MONITORING RESULTS

**Old Growth (C-5):** We are continuing our validation efforts for old growth. Over 120,000 acres were surveyed in FY 1993 and 1994 to determine if the areas were old growth habitat. Of this approximately 16,000 acres were validated and maintained as old growth habitat. Forestwide, over 939,000 acres have now been surveyed and 107,707 acres are validated as old growth habitat (11.4%). The fires of 1994 affected some of these areas. These areas are being revalidated to determine if they still meet old growth criteria. If the areas can no longer function as old growth, then other old growth or "replacement" old growth is being identified.

**Threatened and Endangered Species (C-7):** We're monitoring the quantity and quality of habitat for the recovery of peregrine falcons, gray wolves, bald eagles and grizzly bears. We're also cooperating with other agencies to obtain population estimates or trends.

Peregrine falcon: a single peregrine falcon was observed on the Cabinet District in 1993 and 1994. The presence was likely the result of a hacking site located just west of the area on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest.

Gray wolf: reports of wolf sightings increased in 1993 and 1994. Many of these sightings were of the Murphy Lake pack, but areas on the Cabinet District appear to also have wolves on a transient basis.

Bald eagle: surveys indicate increase in the total number of bald eagles during 1993 and 1994. On August 11, 1995 the bald eagle was reclassified from endangered to threatened in all of the lower 48 states.

Grizzly bear: Grizzly bear habitat continues to improve. Grizzly bear habitat effectiveness is above the Plan's standard on a Forestwide average.

**Fisheries (C-10):** Monitoring data from FY 1993/1994 has been gathered from five representative watersheds but the results are inconclusive. During FY 1993 and 1994, over 45 small watersheds were surveyed for presence of sensitive fish species. To date, 65 watersheds have been identified that contain sensitive fish populations.

**Range Use (D-1):** During the last seven years, grazing use has averaged 91% of the projected level. In FY 1993 use was 96% and 1994 92%.

**Noxious Weeds (D-2):** Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) (E-1): The sell volumes for FY 1993 and 1994 are the lowest in the last seven years and represent approximately 36% and 24% respectively, of the estimated ASQ. This continues the downward trend for this item. The total timber sell program is 59% of the Forest Plan projected ASQ.

**Acres of Timber Sold for Timber Harvest (E-2):** The acres of timber sold for regeneration harvest also continues on a downward trend. Total acres sold is 47% of the Forest Plan projection.

**Suitable Timber Management Area Changes (E-3):** The Forest Plan allows for minor corrections in the boundaries of management areas based upon site-specific analysis and interdisciplinary team review. In 1993 approximately 11,000 acres were removed from the suitable base. In 1994, the suitable base increased by 82 acres. This was the first such increase over the last seven years. A total of 39,640 acres have been removed from the suitable base and placed into unsuitable timber land categories. The largest change has occurred in MA 11, big game winter range, timber (-11,615 acres) and MA 15, timber management (-17,592) acres.

**Timber Harvest Deferrals (E-7):** In FY 1993 and 1994 the amount of timber harvest deferred beyond the life of the plan dropped considerably. 150 acres were deferred in 1993 and 1,137 acres deferred in

1994 compared to 7,200 acres in FY 1992. Approximately 25,000 acres have been deferred over the last seven years.

**Harvest Area Size (E-8, Appendix B-2):** The Forest is continuing to monitor harvest area size. As in prior years, some harvest areas have been approved by the Forest Supervisor to exceed size guidelines. The National Forest Management Act states that the 40 acre size limit does not apply to areas harvested as a result of natural catastrophic conditions such as wildfire, windstorm, or insect attacks.

**Clearcut Acres Sold (E-9):** The Forest has met the congressionally mandated reduction in clearcutting prior to the FY 1995 objective. Additional reduction in clearcutting was expected as a result of guidelines released by the Chief of the Forest Service in 1992. The implementation of these guidelines and other factors have resulted in a 77% decline in clearcutting since 1989.

**Soil and Water Conservation Practices (F-1):** Best management practices were evaluated by Kootenai forest personnel in FY 1993 and 1994, and by a State team in 1994. In FY 1993 and 1994, Kootenai personnel evaluated over 6,000 BMP's on 230 projects. These reviews indicated that the Forest was improving in implementation and effectiveness from previous years. In 1994, the state evaluated 158 BMP's, on four projects. Their findings indicated that the Forest did not improve over the 1992 findings. The Forest is taking several actions to improve the BMP program: additional field training sessions for all personnel, from District Rangers to sale inspectors; an improved BMP Identification and Tracking system; more oversight at the District level for implementation of BMP's; and closer coordination with the Supervisor's Office to complete the BMP feedback loop for better management.

**Water Yield Increases (F-3):** The Forest water yield model is used to analyze the potential effect of disturbance in a watershed as a part of opportunity analysis for timber sales and other activities. If the analysis shows that water yields approach or exceed guidelines, then no projects are proposed or further studies are made which enable our hydrologists to make professional interpretations. Due to past activities (prior to issuance of the Plan), activities on privately owned land, and effects of wildfire, 28% of the portion of the Forest analyzed has water yields exceeding the Forest Plan standard. In these areas, projects have not been undertaken or have been modified so that water quality, beneficial uses, and stream channel integrity are maintained.

**Emerging Issues (H-2):** This item identifies those issues that appear to be developing since the Plan was initiated, and also monitors the original Forest Plan issues that appear to still be of concern. Emerging issues include: ecosystem management, including management of sensitive plants and animals, biodiversity, and old growth; elk vulnerability; and the increased awareness of fuel buildups as it pertains to the wildland/urban interface. Forest Plan issues that still exist are: grizzly bear management, state water quality management, timber supply (local economic impact), road management, public access, potential mineral development, visual (scenic) quality, and community stability.

**Forest Plan Costs (H-3):** Timber sale costs are about four times greater than the Forest Plan projected. This is continuing the upward trend that began in FY 1990. The increase is due to the increasing complexity in timber sale preparation along with the concurrent decrease in the amount of volume being sold.

**Forest Plan Budget Levels (H-4):** As in prior years, there is a great deal of variation in the level of funding for various program areas in comparison to the projected amounts. Notable areas where funding has increased beyond expected are fire suppression, fuels management, law enforcement, tree improvement, and salvage sales. Most other program areas are remaining at budget levels below those projected.

**Insect and Disease Status (P-1):** Stand exams, permanent plots and benchmark exams indicate stands that have been regeneration harvested and those treated with some form of intermediate treatment are healthy with only minor amounts of insect and disease problems.

**Forest Plan Exceptions (Appendix B-3):** Exceptions are short term changes to a standard. The Forest Plan states "If it is determined during project design that the bestPlan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project." Approximately 124 project decisions were issued in FY 1993/1994. Ten exceptions were approved in FY 1993/1994 to allow higher open road densities during activities in Management Areas 12 (Big Game Summer Range) and Management Area 15 (Timber). One exception was approved in FY 1993 which allowed harvest to occur adjacent to existing units prior to providing cover for big game.

**Forest Plan Amendments (Appendix B-4):** The Forest Plan provides a process for amending the plan. Amendments are effective until the plan is revised, or changed. Three Forest Plan amendments were approved in FY 1993. The amendments modified the MA 12 open road density standard for the Detgen-Cowell Creek area on Libby District, and Stevens Ridge area on the Cabinet District; and created Management Area 31 for the Montanore Project. No amendments were approved in FY 1994.

## **FACTORS AFFECTING THE KOOTENAI FOREST PLAN 1995 AND BEYOND**

The following actions occurred in Fiscal Year 1995. The effect of these events will be included in next years monitoring report.

**Rescission Bill:** On July 27, 1995, President Clinton signed the wa Rescission Act (Public Law 104-19) which contains provisions for an emergency salvage timber sale program. The legislation directs the preparation, advertisement, offer and award of contracts for salvage timber sales using expedited procedures. Sales offered under this amendment are not subject to administrative appeals, and deadlines for judicial review are set.

**Amended Biological Opinion on the Kootenai Forest Plan:** On July 27, 1995, the US Fish and Wildlife Service amended their 1985 Biological Opinion on the Kootenai Forest Plan. The purpose of the amended opinion is to include an incidental take statement, pursuant to 50 CFR 402.14(i). The amendment provides reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the incidental take. The measures are non-discretionary and must be implemented by the Kootenai Forest (BO, page 9).

**Inland Native Fish Amendment (INFISH):** The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact was signed on July 28, and became effective August 30, 1995. This decision amended the Kootenai National Forest Plan and is intended to provide interim direction to protect habitat and populations of resident native fish. This interim direction is in the form of riparian management

objectives, standards and guidelines, and monitoring y to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest amendment provides reasonable and prudent measures to minimize the incidental take. The measures are non-discretionary and must be implemented by the Kootenai Forest (BO, page 9).

## **OTHER HAPPENINGS**

Social Assessment: This assessment describes what and how people feel about management of the Kootenai Forest. It was completed under contract and is both informative and honest. While comments are not all positive, they are useful and will be incorporated into improvements in public involvement and public services programs. The Forest is developing a long term public involvement action plan to respond to identified areas of concern.