

**FOREST PLAN ANNUAL MONITORING REPORT  
for Fiscal Year 1995  
Kootenai National Forest**

**INTRODUCTION**

We have recently completed the monitoring of Forest Plan implementation for fiscal year (FY) 1995. 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 1995 we monitored 12 items (all are items to be reported yearly). The FY 1995 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 eight 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:

- **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.
- **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.
- **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**

**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 1995. The presence was likely the result of a hacking site located just west of the area on the Idaho Panhandle National Forest. Another single falcon was observed several times near Libby, but no nest was found.
- ◆ *Gray wolf*: reports of wolf sightings were similar to the last few years. 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 that the total number of bald eagles is similar to past years.
- ◆ *Grizzly bear*: Grizzly bear habitat continues to improve. Grizzly bear habitat effectiveness is above the Plan's standard on a Forestwide average.

**Range Use (D-1)**: During the last eight years, grazing use has averaged 91% of the projected level. In FY 1995 use was 93%.

**Noxious Weeds (D-2)**: Baseline information is still not complete in all parts of the Forest. Efforts were made in 1995 to inventory areas and treat identified sites. Treatment included hand pulling plants, spraying and using biological control (insects that eat the plants).

**Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) (E-1)**: The actual sell volumes for FY 1995 are the lowest in the last eight years and represent approximately 24% of the estimated ASQ. This indicates a leveling-off of a downward trend during the past several years. The total timber sell program, for the eight years (1988-1995) is 54% 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 the last eight years is 38% 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. Land ownership adjustments can also result in a change in the suitable base. In 1995 approximately 1,000 acres were removed from the suitable base. Since 1987 a total of 40,570 acres have been removed from the suitable base and placed into unsuitable timber land categories or into private ownership. The largest changes have occurred in MA 15, timber management (-19,444) acres and MA 11, big game winter range timber (-12,072 acres).

**Timber Harvest Deferrals (E-7)**: In FY 1995 the amount of timber harvest deferred beyond the life of the plan increased from the past two years. 3,235 acres were deferred in 1995 compared to 150 acres in FY 1993 and 1,137 acres in FY 1994. Approximately 29,000 acres have been deferred over the last eight years.

**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 has resulted in a 92% decline in clearcutting since 1989.

**Soil and Water Conservation Practices (F-1)**: Best management practice (BMPs) were evaluated by Kootenai forest personnel in FY 1995 for 166 BMP's on 115 projects. These reviews indicated that the Forest declined in ratings of implementation and effectiveness from previous years, however no ratings were noted "very unacceptable" or "grossly unacceptable" in 1995. In addition, spot

monitoring of BMP effectiveness was done on a project basis on several sites in 1995. These more or less site-specific monitoring projects evaluated BMP's with respect to sediment and turbidity data collected downstream.

**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, 26% 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 are still of concern. Emerging issues include: the increased awareness of fuel buildups as it pertains to the wildland/urban interface; interim grizzly bear management requirements; management of ponderosa pine old growth, balancing public access and Forest Plan standards, and monitoring needs related to the effects of wildfires, particularly tree mortality, vegetative succession, and fuel accumulations. Forest Plan issues that still exist are: grizzly bear 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.

**Project Specific Amendments (Appendix B-2):** Project specific amendments are changes in a standard that only apply to that project. They do not change the standard for the long term. The Forest Plan states, "If it is determined during project design that the best way to meet the goals of the Forest Plan conflicts with a Forest Plan standard, the Forest Supervisor may approve an exception to that standard for the project." Approximately 54 project decisions were issued in FY 1995. Nine project specific amendments were approved in FY 1995 to allow higher open road densities during activities in MAs 12 (Big Game Summer Range) and MA 15 (Timber).

**Programmatic Forest Plan Amendments (Appendix B-3):** The Forest Plan provides a process for amending the plan. Programmatic amendments are effective until the plan is revised, or changed. Three Programmatic Forest Plan Amendments were approved in FY 1995 including a change in open road density standards for MA 12 in Upper Cripple Peak; a change in Forest Plan Appendix 8 open road densities for the Murphy and Deep Bear Analysis Areas; and a change in management direction based on the Inland Native Fish Strategy.

## **FACTORS AFFECTING THE KOOTENAI FOREST PLAN 1996 AND BEYOND**

As reported in the FY 1993/1994 Monitoring Report, several events occurred in FY 1995. This section gives an update on the status of those events and any new effects that have occurred in 1996.

**Rescission Bill:** On July 27, 1995, President Clinton signed the Rescission Act (Public Law 104-19) which contains provisions for an emergency salvage timber sale program. Sales offered under this Law are not subject to administrative appeals, and deadlines for judicial review are set. The Kootenai National Forest has scheduled approximately 130 Rescission Bill salvage sales. Of these approximately 60 sales have been sold for a total of 55 MMBF in FY 1995 and 1996. Full environmental analysis and public involvement are being completed on these sales.

One lawsuit, which includes seven salvage sales, has been filed. The salvage decisions were upheld in District Court. The District Court decision was appealed to the Ninth Circuit court and a hearing was held in March 1996. No decision has been rendered. Salvage timber sale receipts will go back to the local counties. In 1995, County receipts from the administrative Kootenai National Forest totalled approximately \$5,188,272. This money is used by local counties for maintenance and improvement of county roads and for use by the schools. Most of the county receipts came from timber sales (including green and salvage sales).

Public Law 104-19 includes a provision that all term grazing permits that have expired shall be re-issued as is until NEPA analysis is completed. In addition, the law states that no more than 20% of Forest allotments may have NEPA analysis completed prior to the end of FY 1996. For the Kootenai National Forest this means 9 out of 45 allotments may have NEPA analysis completed and a decision made prior to FY 1997. All other grazing permits must be re-issued as is and may not be modified until the proper analysis has been completed.

**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 opinion included terms and conditions which must be followed unless departures are agreed to in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The Kootenai is implementing the terms and conditions of the opinion, however the effects of meeting the conditions have been identified as an emerging issue.

**Inland Native Fish Amendment (INFISH):** The Decision Notice and Finding of No Significant Impact was signed on July 28, 1995, and became effective August 30, 1995. Per the direction of the Decision Notice the Kootenai National Forest has completed action plans for high, moderate and low risk projects. Subsequent monitoring indicates that INFISH guidelines are being incorporated into project planning and implementation.

**Social Assessment:** This assessment was completed in 1995. It identified items that the Kootenai Forest should consider in Forest Plan revision. The assessment also identified items that could be addressed immediately. The Forest has reviewed the assessment and developed an action plan to address some of the items. Items that have been implemented or occurred to date are: (1) including the Kootenai Highlights, a summary of Forest activities, with the Quarterly Schedule of Proposed Actions; (2) participating in community events such as Ant Flat Days; (3) actively participating with the local Forest Congress effort; (4) trying different methods of public involvement; and (5) assisting with local disasters and emergencies.

**Kootenai Roundtable:** On November 28, approximately 80 people from diverse backgrounds participated in the Kootenai Roundtable for the Seventh American Forest Congress. The purpose of the Seventh American Forest Congress is to "develop a shared vision, a set of principles, and recommendations for action that will result in improved policies for our nations's forests". A follow-up committee consisting of approximately 20 people who attended the roundtable has been established to develop "our next steps". The Kootenai Forest is an active participant with the roundtable group. The objective of the follow-up committee is to build relationships, provide an atmosphere for open discussion, build community influence and take responsibility for our actions.

**Forest Plan appeal decision:** On November 21, 1995, the Chief rendered a decision on the Kootenai National Forest Plan appeal, filed in 1987 by the Montana Wilderness Association and Cabinet Resource Group. In summary, the decision affirmed the Forest Plan Record of Decision and directed the Regional Forester to:

- 1) Clarify that Forest Plan exceptions will be made through project specific amendments;
- 2) Amend or revise the Forest Plan to incorporate the amended biological opinion and Interagency Guidelines;
- 3) Amend or revise the Forest Plan to correct the ASQ calculation which was inaccurate due to a technical error;
- 4) Set a program sell level not to exceed 150 MMBF until an amendment or revision of the ASQ is done; and
- 5) Review oil and gas leasing direction to see if the Forest Plan complies with the new regulations (1990).

This appeal decision gives the Forest one year to complete the amendments or issue a Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan.

**Floods:** The Kootenai Forest experienced high flows in both late November and late February from a combination of events: high precipitation, warm temperatures, and in the case of the February event, channels filled with ice from the January sub-zero period, followed by more warm temperatures and rain. Damages to date are limited to the south half of the forest, particularly in the lower elevation zones. Repairs have been made to several problem areas and funds are being sought through the Emergency Relief Federal Owned Program for the more extensively damaged sites, i.e. Fisher River, etc. Additional damaged areas will no doubt be found in the spring but a plan is underway to identify and treat these. No long term impact to forest uses is expected from these events.

In addition, the saturated soil conditions have caused numerous slumps and land failures throughout the forest, even in areas that did not have actual flooding or high flow problems. We expect to see more of these areas in the spring. For both of these problem-type areas, a plan is underway to

identify and treat these as they appear. No long-term impact to forest uses is expected from these events.