

4.3.1.1 Process for Identification and Selection of Significant Environmental Aspects for the PSICC Environmental Management System

This element identifies the Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands (Grasslands) aspects and describes the process used to determine which of those aspects could have significant impacts to the environment. Aspects are elements of an organization's activities, products, or services that can interact with the environment.

The Aspect Screening Process describes the procedure used to:

1. Identify aspects and related impacts that the organization can control or have influence over.
2. Determine which of those aspects are significant to the organization.

The potential impacts caused by a significant aspect are of major concern so the significant aspects are incorporated into the rest of the EMS Guide and related documents. A team of Grasslands representatives would convene annually to repeat Steps 1- 4 (described below) to review the relevancy of current significant aspects and to consider the inclusion of additional or deletion of existing significant aspects. The EMS management representative is responsible for this review.

A. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to describe the process the Pike and San Isabel National Forests and Cimarron and Comanche National Grasslands (PSICC) will use to determine significant environmental aspects for the Grasslands as required by ISO 14001:2004, clause 4.3.1.

B. Aspect Screening Process

The environmental aspects team involved in Step 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the significant aspects screening process will be identified in the meeting minutes and/or rating worksheets. The team will use the current year performance accomplishment report (PAR) to identify the activities, outputs, and services that are aspects for EMS. PAR codes reflect the most comprehensive listing of activities that Congress funds the Forest Service to accomplish. These are the activities that the agency is accountable for. The activities are organized under program areas based on our budgeting processes and resource areas defined by legal and other requirements. Agency activities that are not accountable through PAR are administrative in nature or support activities designed to facilitate accomplishment of PAR targets. The PAR activities make up the aspects of the Grassland's program of work and are moved forward in step one to determine their significance.

Step 1: As an awareness step, staff and line will compare PAR activities with public generated issues identified in the Grassland Plan as key areas of public concerns.

Step 2: Line and staff will consider if each PAR activity occurs on the Grassland, if the activity is in the scope of the EMS, if it has the potential to be ground disturbing or have a measurable effect on the environment, whether it occurs at a scale that could be of concern and if it has been identified as a public concern. If the answer to any of these questions is no, this aspect is determined to be not a significant aspect. Those aspects where the answer to these questions is yes are moved forward to step three.

Step 3: Resource specialists then evaluate the level of potential impact to resources from the identified activities. If the aspect scores at the high level (15-18) the aspect is potentially significant and is be moved to the next step. If no aspect scores as high, then all aspect moves to step 4 for assessment by line officers. Line has the discretion to select any of the potential significant aspects evaluated in Step 3 to be included in the EMS.

Step 4: Line takes the information generated in Steps 1-3 and evaluates if an aspect is of interest to line to include as a significant aspect in EMS.

Each step is described in further detail below.

Step 1 - Key Areas of Concern

Step 1 is to provide awareness of the relationship between aspects and public concerns to line and staff. Public input was sought for development of the Grasslands Plan, and our evaluation of public comments resulted in six management challenges that were addressed in the Grasslands Plan. The documentation of our collaborative processes is in the administrative record located in the planning department at the PSICC Supervisor's Office.

This first step is important because it identifies the programs-of-work that most concerns the public. Step 1 identified six aspect categories (management challenges) that are areas of moderate to high public concern. These aspect categories are:

1. Land ownership pattern
2. Tamarisk
3. Nonnative invasive plant species
4. Disturbance process used to manage declining bird habitat
5. Lack of vegetative diversity
6. Recreation and tourism demands

These six aspect categories, or *Key Areas of Public Concern*, are further considered in Step 2.

Step 2 - Possible Significant Aspect Identification

The six aspect categories identified in Step 1 provide focus on those aspects that are of moderate to high public concern. The purpose of the Step 2 is to identify potential significant from the comprehensive list of

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aspects identified by PAR. The criteria being used to evaluate the activities, outputs, and services will be answered either “yes” or “no”, followed by a brief summary of the reasoning for inclusion or exclusion of the aspect. Aspects receiving one or more “no” ratings will not be moved forward to Step 3. Line and staff officers will rate the Step 2 aspects and document their findings in Worksheet **A**. The questions used in Step 2 are:

1. Is the activity within the scope of the PSICC EMS Guide?
2. Does the activity occur on the Grasslands? If so, specifically what activity?
3. Is the activity ground disturbing?
4. Could this activity have a measurable effect on the environment?
5. Is the scale of the activity greater than 1,840 acres per year?
6. Has this activity been identified as one of moderate to high public concern in the Plan revision process? If yes, which one(s)?

Steps 3 and 4 - Significant Aspect/Impact Identification

Steps 3 and 4 determine whether the activity, output and/or service are a significant environmental aspect. The third and fourth steps identify aspects and associated potential impacts, and a rating process to assess the risk of the potential impacts to resources associated with each aspect.

Identifying aspects and associated impacts

Worksheets B and C include the following potential impact categories that will be used to evaluate each aspect:

1. Air
2. Heritage resources
3. Paleontological resources
4. Scenery
5. Soils
6. Species-of-concern
7. Species-of-interest
8. Vegetative diversity
9. Water

Worksheets B and C include the following questions that will be used to evaluate each aspect and to rank the activities effect on the environment.

Screening Questions	Scoring Definition
Question #1 – Have our stakeholders identified the activity (aspect) as a major potential influence on the environment?	0 – No identified concern 1 – Infrequent concerns expressed about the activity 2 – Some public concerns expressed, occasional appeal points or identified through project scoping 3 – Frequent concerns expressed through public meetings, project scoping, and appeals
Question #2 – Is the impact from the activity related to the PSICC’s Environmental Policy commitments?	1 – Policy requirement only 2 – Tied to Chief’s four threats or Region 2 emphasis items 3 – Required by Federal or State law
Question #3 – Will increased focus on the activity maintain or strengthen stakeholder trust in Forest Service actions where interested parties have expressed concerns about environmental impacts?	0 – Little to no interest expressed 1 – Not likely to improve public trust 2 – Somewhat likely to improve public trust 3 – Very likely to improve public trust
Question #4 – How severe are the potential short-term effects from the action?	0 - No effect 1 – Low 2 – Moderate 3 – High
Question #5 - How severe are the potential long-term effects from the action?	0 - No effect 1 – Low 2 – Moderate 3 – High
Question #6 – What frequency is the impact to the environment expected to occur?	0 - Never 1 - Low 2 - Moderate 3 - High

Step 3 – Worksheet B screening

Grasslands resource specialists and/or SO program managers will complete Worksheet B, rating the aspects that move through the Steps 1 and 2. A cumulative score for each aspect and potential impact category will be determined. Scores in the range of 15 to the maximum score of 18 indicate high risk of potential impacts to the associated resources. Aspects rated as high risk in any resource area would be recommended as significant aspects. If no aspects receive a rating of high risk, then all aspects are forwarded to step 4 for line assessment.

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Step 4 – Worksheet C screening

Results from the Worksheet B screening process will be reviewed by the Forest Supervisor and Line Officers through a DELPHI approach to consider overall significance. The collective knowledge, judgment and experience of this group will be used to validate results from Worksheet B, and to refine the list based upon a combination of professional experience and knowledge of current public opinion. In general, Worksheet C screening criteria will focus on 1) the amount and degree of public concern or interest in the aspect as it relates to environmental effects, 2) risks associated with the activity to the environment, 3) refinement and clarification of environmental effects, and 4) anticipated future land management issues (e.g. wildlife habitat, fragmentation, on-site infrastructure) and its potential effects on Grasslands resources. All four criteria will be evaluated at once into a single numeric value on a 1-3 scale. A value of 1 represents little concern moving to a value of 3 being of greatest concern. Any aspect receiving a rating of 3 in this step would be considered a significant environmental aspect. The "Rationale" column documents the thought processes of the combined group when rating the aspects.

Approved Significant Environmental Aspects and Environmental Effects:

On January 23, 2007, Forest Supervisor Robert Leaverton approved the following Significant Environmental Aspects and environmental effect(s) for the Grasslands:

Category of programs and resources:	Livestock Management
Significant Environmental Aspect:	Permitted Livestock Grazing

Environmental effects:	Species of Concern Vegetative Diversity
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Category of programs and resources:	Fire Management
Significant Environmental Aspect:	Prescribed Fire
Environmental effects:	Vegetative Diversity