



Flathead National Forest

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Recreation Site Facility Master Planning on Flathead National Forest **Open House Scheduled January 23**

The Flathead National Forest is hosting an open house on Tuesday, January 23, to share information about the forest's strategy to manage developed recreation sites (campgrounds, rental cabins/lookouts, developed trailheads, river access facilities, picnic areas and boat launches) on the forest. The open house will be at the Outlaw Inn in Kalispell, 4-7pm, with a formal presentation at 5:30pm.

Each national forest in the nation is completing a recreation site facility master planning analysis. This analysis determines what tasks are needed over the next five years to bring the forest's recreation infrastructure into alignment with the resources available to operate and maintain it to standard and with the public's current and expected demands.

This analysis is focused on developed recreation sites. It does not address trail maintenance, wilderness management or dispersed recreation.

The strategy on the Flathead National Forest includes changes in services or seasons of operations at many sites. Services are anticipated to remain through the core summer season, Memorial Day through Labor Day, but may be decreased in the shoulder seasons. Seven of the existing 94 developed recreation sites on the forest will have some services removed, making them available for dispersed recreation opportunities. Three new cabin rental sites are anticipated and an increase in fees at some sites has been identified. The forest is also searching for any partnership opportunities that may help in managing developed recreation sites on the forest.

For more information about the recreation site facility planning analysis or the open house, please contact Flathead National Forest Recreation Leader Bruce Johnson at 758-5352 or visit www.fs.fed.us/r1/flathead.

Recreation Sites Facility Master Planning Questions & Answers

1. What is RS-FMP?

Recreation Sites Facility Master Planning (RS-FMP) is an analysis tool being used nationally to help national forests create a sustainable program that aligns their developed recreation sites with visitors' desires and use. RS-FMP helps ensure that developed recreation sites make sense considering each national forest's special characteristics. The RS-FMP tool carefully assesses where to focus investments and energy to be as responsive as possible to visitors' needs. By understanding our visitors' needs, national forests can make more informed decisions that match available resources to visitor recreation preferences and patterns.

2. Why is the Forest Service going through this process?

Each national forest will examine their recreation facilities and evaluate how they might operate and maintain these structures and sites more efficiently – both as prudent financial managers and in terms of meeting the changing needs of our public. Because many facilities were built in the 1960s and are reaching the end of their useful life, each forest needs to make decisions about what recreation services are needed for the forest's recreation program. Providing a recreation program that addresses the changing needs of the nation is the major consideration.

- Average age of developed recreation facilities is 40 years old.
- From 1990 to 2000, the US population grew 13.1%.
- The most popular activities across the US are more passive activities: sightseeing, picnicking, driving, for pleasure and visiting historic sites.
- 34% of developed campgrounds are managed by concessionaires.

3. How will the public benefit from this planning process?

RS-FMP will result in a higher quality, more efficiently managed developed recreation program where the best facilities support recreation opportunities in the right places.

4. Isn't this just a way to get rid of recreation sites?

No. Many factors are considered in evaluating each developed recreation sites. These considerations are related to how well a site supports the recreation needs

of the public on that national forest, the role that sites plays in the local community, and the site's relationship to the environment.

5. Is the FS privatizing recreation venues on public lands?

Recreation opportunities on the national forests and grasslands are provided by a wide array of means. By far, the majority of our visitors are supported by Forest Service staff. Others are supported through the efforts of volunteers and non-profit partnerships. Private interests providing recreation opportunities on public lands is a long-standing practice and may be one of the options a Forest considers when determining how to best manage a particular recreation site. It makes sense, in some cases, to have private interests, who have the resources, the business savvy and a good visitor service ethic to construct and operate desired recreation opportunities like ski resorts or marinas, and to, in other cases, take over daily management tasks like operating campgrounds... Alpine ski areas have long been managed by private companies and outfitters and guides provide a variety of services for many recreation activities. Concession operation is one option a national forest considers when determining how to best manage a particular recreation site.

6. What happens to sites that are currently operated by a concessionaire?

Those sites are evaluated through the RS-FMP process for possible efficiencies in operation. Any proposed changes in operation would be negotiated with the concessionaire, within the framework of their current permit.

7. In an era when recreation demand is increasing, shouldn't the Forest Service also be increasing the number of recreation sites?

Recreation on national forest lands takes many forms. Use is increasing, but it doesn't necessarily involve developed facilities. RS-FMP focuses on developed recreation – one piece of the overall recreation program. RS-FMP helps the Forest Service understand what people are doing, where they are recreating on the landscape, and what facilities may or may not be needed to support those activities. The Forest Service must gather and consider this type of information before making decisions about whether to increase the number of developed recreation sites.

8. What is the Forest Service using to establish recreation needs?

RS-FMP is used to look at what the forests offer in terms of recreation opportunities and what the public wants in terms of outdoor recreation on public land. The Forest Service uses a blend of public participation and data analysis in

the process. Market and demographic survey information is used to describe the majority of the visitors to a specific national forest and one-on-one survey information from visitors to that national forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring survey). The Forest Service also uses information collected on a statistical basis from the entire country (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment). In addition, each forest will include public participation and input throughout the entire process, as they work to develop a five-year program of work for their forest's developed recreation sites program. Involvement of the local public, surrounding communities and each national forest's recreation visitors is a critical and essential component of the RS-FMP process. This will ensure the national forest is providing the best recreation opportunities in the right places.

9. How will the public be involved?

The public is involved in the entire RS-FMP process. Initially, the public is involved through survey results and demographic information. Forests also engage local communities and stakeholders in a dialogue about a forest's special settings and opportunities and visitors' needs and expectations (niche). After ensuring data are adequate for initial analysis and including any public input received at this point, staff will prepare, share, review, and discuss a proposed 5-year program of work with the public, national forest visitors, and local communities. Throughout the five-year planning period, public involvement and feedback will be imperative to ensure that the Forest Service meets visitor and community needs and provides the best recreation opportunities in the best places.

10. How many and what types of recreation sites will be affected and on what kind of timetable?

All developed sites such as campgrounds, rustic campgrounds, trailheads, interpretive sites, boat launches, and picnic sites will be analyzed and may experience changes. However, many changes to recreation sites won't be noticeable by the visiting public. Changes will occur during a five-year implementation period of the RS-FMP with input from the public to help improve the planned program of work.

11. How soon will the public notice any changes in management of developed recreation sites?

Simple changes will most likely occur sooner but will not be noticeable to the public, such as how often a recreation site's grass is mowed. Other changes may be more complex, requiring additional analysis and public involvement and may occur over a long period of time.

12. Will some sites be permanently closed?

After an appropriate level of public involvement, in some cases, this could be an outcome. Closing a site does not necessarily mean that the location can no longer be used. The Forest Service may change the level of services provided at a site, such as removing a toilet or a water system at a campground, but the public will still be able to camp in the same location with a more rustic experience.

13. How does RS-FMP relate to Forest Plan Revision, Travel Management and other planning efforts?

There is a consistent tie between RS-FMP and other planning efforts. The RS-FMP gives guidance to travel management and can be used to help describe the desired future condition in forest plan revisions. Where other planning efforts have occurred prior to RS-FMP, it builds on and tiers from them, adding a qualitative and focused look at the developed recreation program.

14. How can partners or volunteer groups be involved in recreation facilities?

For sites that have strong community or visitor support, offers to operate and maintain those sites will be considered. A partnership needs to be a long-term commitment that provides consistency for communities that value a particular site.

15. How does RS-FMP influence and help support local tourism goals?

The Forest Service recognizes the importance of recreation and tourism to many communities. Public participation will include discussion of local tourism goals and how recreation sites help meet those goals.

16. How does RS-FMP work into the future? Will new sites ever be developed? Will current sites ever be re-evaluated?

RS-FMP helps us efficiently use our available resources to provide the best quality recreation opportunities possible. In so doing, we position ourselves to better respond to changing recreation demands with facilities and programs in the future. Forests will review the RS-FMP five-year program of work every year to monitor how well they are implementing it and whether modifications are required. As new sites are needed to help carry out the developed recreation program, proposed sites would be evaluated with an appropriate level of public involvement through the RS-FMP process to ensure the public's needs would be met with a new sites.

17. Are you selling recreation sites?

There are no plans to sell recreation sites.