

**USDA Forest Service Tele-News briefing  
With Sally Collins, Forest Service Associate Chief,  
Dr. Ann Bartuska, Forest Service, Deputy Chief, Research and Development  
Fred Norbury Forest Service Deputy Associate Chief, National Forest System  
Rick Cables, Forest Service Rocky Mountain Regional Forester  
December 22, 2004, 1 p.m.  
Washington D.C.**

MR. DAN JIRON: Good afternoon. I'm Dan Jiron, and I am the National Press Officer for USDA Forest Service in Washington, DC.

Today we're announcing the planning rule for USDA Forest Service. If you have a question, when you get to the question and answer period in today's announcement, press "1" on your key pad and you'll be able to ask that question. If you have a second one, when you've finished just press "1" again and you'll roll back into the queue and then we'll be able to take that question after that.

If you have questions for follow-up after we are done with today's announcement formally with this group, you can contact me at 202-205-0896.

On that, I'll turn it over to our associate chief, Sally Collins of USDA Forest Service.

MS. SALLY COLLINS: Good morning, everybody. And thank you very much for being here today. I know this is a really busy week for everybody, and we appreciate your time and attention to this really important issue that we're putting before you today.

Today we're announcing the Forest Service's new planning rule, which we believe to better protect the environment and to assure that our national forests and our national grasslands provide clean air, clean water, and abundant wildlife for future generations.

This new rule I think for those of you who were part of the process a year and a half ago know that this is a rule that was prepared by the Forest Service and represents many years of work on the part of the professionals and the agency planners and many others.

I personally was a former forest supervisor and a forest planner. I've written plans, I've been responsible for executing plans my entire career of 25 years, and I've learned a couple of things over that period of time. And those are the kinds of things we're putting into this rule.

One is that you can't have a plan that fits every national forest. Every national forest is different. And we also need a plan that creates a dynamic, living document that allows us to respond rapidly to changing conditions. You know the wildfires we've had over the last few years, and invasive species. And clearly lots of new science is

developed every day.

So what I'm going to do today is just go through some highlights of what's in this planning rule which we're very excited about, and then introduce a couple of people who are here with me today, and then you can ask some questions.

Let me start out with talking about sustainability because sustainability is the foundation of this planning rule. And if you look at it very simply, this means that sustainability must be provided for on every one of our national forests and grasslands.

Now to achieve that, what we have done is we've adopted an internationally recognized standard for sustainability which means that by keeping the social and the economic and the ecological aspects of the environment in harmony we can assure that our forests will be sustained in the long term.

The second thing that we're really pleased about with this planning rule is, the public is going to have an effective voice in the process from beginning to end. You know, in order for the public to stay effectively engaged in planning we have to have a process that we can complete in a relatively short period of time. This process is shorter and collaboration is critical, and this rule does that. For the first time ever the Forest Service is adopting an open, independent audit that will provide for an objective and transparent look at everything we do. Now this is really important because it is really new. We are using an Environmental Management System, which again is an internationally accepted approach of continually improving the environment. All of the information in this independent audit is available for the public to review so it is a very transparent process and it's the highest level of accountability we have had so far.

The 2004 rule reinforces our commitment to science by bringing the best available science into our planning process and that science is the foundation of the rule.

Let me give you an example. This new rule represents a really solid scientific basis to provide for protections of wildlife by requiring an examination at both the landscape and the species level when it's necessary to assure species recovery.

Now the 2004 rule will clearly be more efficient. We know that we can write a plan and revise it in significantly less time; that allows us to put our limited public dollars to work where they can really do the most good--which is restoring degraded landscapes and monitoring our actions to be sure we're getting results from the ground.

And I want to finally end by reemphasizing that this rule allows us to continually improve the environment by bringing in new information and new science all the time, allowing us to respond to emerging threats and issues like big wildfires, increased recreation, invasive species, and the loss of open space which is fragmenting wildlife habitat.

This last point is really important. We have to have a rule that really addresses

the issues and threats of the decades ahead, not the issues that framed the past. Most of you probably know that we're celebrating our centennial, our 100<sup>th</sup> year as an agency, in a couple of weeks.

Today the work on our national forests is restoring the land. It's focused on some different things like reducing the risk of catastrophic fire to communities. We're talking and working much more on trying to manage an explosion of recreation users that are out there and frankly averting an ecological crisis by preventing or eradicating invasive species.

Invasive species, by the way, are the single greatest threat to imperiled species worldwide. And if we really care about biodiversity in this country we have to be on top of issues like these.

We need plans that consider new issues quickly and recommend actions before damage occurs. This is a planning rule that will take us into that future by protecting the environment and promoting all of the values that Americans love about their forests-- clean air, clean water, rich and abundant wildlife, and the opportunity to enjoy it which we are all blessed with in this country.

So that's a quick summary of what the rule is about.

I have with me today several people. Dr. Ann Bartuska, who is our leader, heads up our research organization, which you probably know is the largest research organization on natural resource issues in the world. She came to us from the Nature Conservancy a year ago. She's the outgoing president of the Ecological Society of America. And she'll talk about the science involved in the planning rule.

Fred Norbury is the associate deputy chief of our National Forest System in charge of Planning.

And also with us connected by phone is Regional Forester Rick Cables. He's calling in from Denver today. He's responsible for managing 22 million acres across five states and the Rocky Mountain region. And he will be offering field perspective from the Forest Service.

Ann and Fred and Rick, I'd like for you all to just make a quick statement, and then we'll be available and open up for questions.

Ann, why don't you start?

DR. ANN BARTUSKA: Thank you, Sally. And hello to all of you.

As deputy chief for Research and Development in the Forest Service, I really feel fortunate of being part of the release of this planning rule because I think it underscores the importance the Forest Service is placing on the role of science in decision-making, a

role that really does date back to our founding 100 years ago.

The rule helps ensure that credible science is behind determinations of species management and helps ensure that credible science is the foundation of the monitoring standards, and that credible science will help deliver Forest Service land management for clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife and addressing the many threats that Sally has already mentioned.

I believe these efforts reinforce the overarching role that credible science must play in achieving sustainability of our national forests and grasslands.

There's another aspect of this rule that I want to emphasize, especially with being responsible for the science that we bring to the table--and that's that this rule incorporates internationally accepted protocols for monitoring. As Sally mentioned I spent time with the Nature Conservancy and became very involved in international efforts to achieve sustainability and recognized the value of the public/private partnerships to accomplish this work on the ground.

This planning rule recognizes that we in the Forest Service are part of international conservation community and that we're building that upon the experience and science that others have provided.

Finally, this rule provides guidance that will better integrate science and practice. We in the research branch of the Forest Service are committed to working with our managers at all levels of the organization to determine that their science needs are met. But the rule also expects our managers to continuously improve the knowledge and information they use to make decisions. And I see a very important role for myself and my staff in the future of ensuring that we bring the tools to the table that the managers can use--and supporting the activities that are called for in the rule.

Thank you very much.

MS. COLLINS: Thanks, Ann.

And Fred.

MR. FRED NORBURY: As Sally said, my name is Fred Norbury. I'm the associate deputy chief for the National Forest System. I've worked for the Forest Service for 23 years now, and I've spent most of that career working in forest planning in one way or another. And as Sally said, the past two decades in doing forest planning we've learned some things.

My most recent learning experience was in Alaska where I spent 10 years trying to get a plan completed that was only going to last 15 years once we got it. As a result of that experience and some other experiences I've had in planning, I came to Washington a few years ago believing that we simply had to find a better way to do our forest plans.

And with this rule, I believe we've found it.

MS. COLLINS: Thank you, Fred.

And Rick, are you on the line?

MR. RICK CABLES: Yes. Can you hear me, Sally?

MS. COLLINS: Yes, I can. Thank you. Rick, why don't you make a short statement?

MR. CABLES: Thank you. And I'm going to say good morning because it's still morning out here in Colorado. It's a beautiful, snowy morning.

As Sally said, my name is Rick Cables, and I am responsible for about 22 million acres of national forests and grasslands out in the Rocky Mountain region; 11 national forests, five of which have to revise their forest plans. And we're really excited to have the opportunity to revise those plans using this new rule.

The field is extremely excited about the new rule. And there's three reasons why.

The best part of this rule in my mind is that it absolutely reduces process and bureaucracy and gets us out of the office doing planning and into the field implementing projects on the ground that make a difference in terms of providing for clean water, clean air and abundant wildlife and all the things people want.

We're going to be able to better restore forests, to make communities safer, and reduce the threat of catastrophic wildfire. We're going to be better prepared and have more resources available to enhance wildlife habitat through project implementation, and to have boots on the ground to work with recreationists whether they're enjoying their national forests on an off-highway vehicle responsibly or visiting a pristine wilderness area.

So redirecting resources away from the planning process and into implementation while still doing it with sound science is really something we're trying to do.

The second reason I'm excited about this in the field is because it really helps our public involvement. As Fred said, and I've heard similar comments from folks, is it takes us 10 years to complete a plan that has a 15-year lifespan. And the public just can't understand that, why it would take so long.

Moreover, the people who really want to stay engaged in a planning process because they care about a national forest are not able to because it just takes too long; it's too much time.

And I think with this new rule we're going to allow regular citizens to participate from start to finish. And I think that's a great improvement.

And lastly, the third reason I'm excited about this is, it helps place the authority in the hands of some of the folks that are most intimate with the forest resources themselves. Forest supervisors will be the responsible officials with this planning rule. And they are the ones that are going to be accountable to the public on how those national forests look.

So getting the authority into the hands of the folks that are most directly influencing the management of the forests and most knowledgeable about it is a critical and major improvement, in my mind.

So thank you.

MS. COLLINS: Thanks very much, Rick.

And why don't I turn it back to you, Dan, for questions?

MR. JIRON: We will be going to questions here just shortly. And our first one comes from Greg Lemon from the Ravelli Republic. Go ahead, Greg.

REPORTER: Thank you. Yeah. I was curious. The Bitterroot National Forest just kind of surrounds my paper, my area. We're in the middle of forest planning process. And so my question is, how is this going to affect this change happening midway through the planning process? How is this going to affect the rest of the planning process? Are they going to have to start over, is it going to be an amalgamation of new ways versus old ways? How is that going to affect it?

MS. COLLINS: I'm going to let Fred answer that question.

MR. NORBURY: Well, I always hate saying this but, it depends. The rule actually allows forests like the Bitterroot to make a choice. They'll be able to finish their planning under the rule that's currently in effect. Or if they think there's enough advantage for them to move to the new rule, they'll have the opportunity to do that-- in which case they would have to make a case-by-case determination of exactly which features they would, how they would blend the two rules together.

The new rule does offer some significant advantages. It's a better way to plan, a better way to protect the environment, and we think it's going to be really attractive to forests like the Bitterroot. But they're going to have to make that decision for themselves because this rule puts the authority back in the local level, back with the forest supervisor.

MR. JIRON: Thanks for that. Let's go to Jeff Barnard from the Associated Press.

REPORTER: Hi. I'm out in Oregon. Do you anticipate these rules being used to

increase logging levels in your forest plans?

MS. COLLINS: Jeff, this is Sally Collins. No decisions are made regarding specific actions like cutting of trees or creating a ski area and that sort of thing in the planning process. Now really the planning process is a much broader-based process whereby we bring citizens together to look at what we want the desired condition of the land to be, collectively to look at what we need to do to improve the environment, to enhance wildlife, to assure that we've got clean water, and, therefore, take action pursuant to that plan later on that takes us toward that desired condition.

So that's where other actions come in. And again it's a subsequent planning process, environmental process before any decisions subsequent to the plan are made.

MR. JIRON: Why don't we go to Glen Martin from the San Francisco Chronicle?

REPORTER: Yes, hi. I'm just curious. You talked several times about accepted international protocols. What are these accepted international protocols? Who drafted them? What are they? I don't understand?

MS. COLLINS: Let me just start with the environmental management system, which is again an internationally recognized system for continually improving the environment. We actually use this system in some of our engineering areas already; and many companies, private and NGOs, and other governments use an environmental management system to improve the environment.

It's a system for providing an independent audit on a yearly basis of literally everything you're doing. Are you complying with the standards or guidelines that you put in front of you? Are you accomplishing the work that you anticipated? Is it working? Is the science being brought in an appropriate time? All of those kind of questions.

All of those kind of questions are considered so that you can see whether or not you're moving toward providing the clean water, clean air, wildlife, recreation opportunities and all those goals and objectives that you set in that plan.

This international protocol again is set in an international arena by the International Standards Organization.

MR. JIRON: Okay. Let's go to Tao Stein of the Denver Post.

REPORTER: Does the new regulation expand the use of categorical exclusions in any way, particularly as they relate to the forest planning process?

MS. COLLINS: Fred, do you want to answer that?

MR. NORBURY: Not necessarily. What the rule says is that plans have to

comply with NEPA. And all the plans prepared under this rule comply fully with the National Environmental Policy Act and the regulations for the National Environmental Policy Act that are issued by the Council of Environmental Quality.

There are three possibilities under those regulations--to do an EIS, Environmental Impact Statement, an environmental assessment or a categorical exclusion.

What the rule does is, it allows a judgment to be made as to which of those avenues is the best way to comply with NEPA and the best way to support our use of the Environmental Management System.

We think that's a better way to protect the environment. We think it's a more efficient way to do our planning.

MR. JIRON: Okay. Let's go to John Myers of the Duluth News Tribune.

REPORTER: Part of my question was answered. I'll restate it quickly. If we have three forests in our area that are already in the appeals period of their long-term forest plans, it sounds as if this would not affect or only marginally affect that.

The other question is, do you see this affecting your current OHV rule-planning effort?

MS. COLLINS: Fred?

MR. NORBURY: I'm not personally familiar with where those forests are. But assuming you're correct that those forests are in the appeal period this rule has no effect on the conclusion of the planning effort for those forests. They are well past the window for using this new rule.

Now as far as the OHV rule, goes, the OHV rule is entirely consistent with this new rule. The way they work together is, that the plan establishes the desired conditions for the forest, objectives we're going to pursue in the forest, and then the procedures established by the OHV rule decides specifically which roads, trails and areas of the forest will be open and which will be closed.

So the two work in harmony, but they're distinct rule-makings with their own processes. And together we think that's an example of a much better way to do planning and it's consistent with our objective of doing a better job of protecting the environment and making our planning more efficient and more effective.

MR. JIRON: Okay. Thanks for that.

Let's go to Seth Borenstein from Knight Ridder.

REPORTER: Yes. Thank you.



Seeing that we didn't get to see this plan until this announcement, forgive me if this isn't in. But critics have said that according to your proposed 2002 rule that this would actually reduce public participation. You keep saying over and over again it allows public participation. They cite under the fact that you, under the 2002 proposal you could have amendments to individual forest plans that do not need to be made public for five years and allowing more categorical exclusions would this make-- less going through the EIS process would decrease public participation.

Can you explain how you say you're increasing public participation yet keeping some of these things from the public?

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury. Let me address both. This rule actually, we believe, expands the public's opportunity to become involved in the planning process. It makes your involvement more effective. Now you mentioned two specific things about the proposed rule that we've heard about, and we've heard that in our public comments.

One of them was, the interim amendment. The way the interim amendment worked is not quite the way you described it, but that's kind of irrelevant now because that whole interim amendment concept has been dropped and does not appear in the final rule.

Secondly, the rule establishes public participation requirement and collaboration requirement that are considerably in excess of anything that's required by the National Environmental Policy Act or its implementing regulations.

The public has--this regulation creates a much broader, deeper and more consistent public involvement than anything we've ever required before.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thank you for that.

Let's go to, looking at the list, let's go to Christopher Doering from Reuters.

REPORTER: This is already been answered in some ways. But I was wondering if you could go into a little more detail as to when the EISs could be where a forest plan wouldn't have to do an environmental impact statement.

And also if you have any estimates as to how much this new plan would save the Forest Service each year?

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury again. Taking your second question first, our estimates are a cost saving of something on the order of 30 percent. That's a guess since we've not actually been through this process. But we did go through a discipline process of trying to estimate it using standard methods that the private sector uses to estimate the cost of industrial processes. And we came up with an estimate of 30 percent reduction. And that's in the benefit cost analysis that will accompany this rule. So you

can see those numbers and see how we got to them.

We really do think we have a solid basis for believing that this rule does create a more efficient planning process.

As far as the EIS goes, it depends. Again, I apologize for saying, it depends. It depends upon the nature of the plan. If the plan basically sets goals for a forest--just the mere fact of setting goals for a forest, we don't think, has an environmental effect. That's not the sort of thing you'd pursue in an EIS.

When a plan goes beyond that and actually makes decisions that are going to cause changes on the ground that is creating environmental effects. And that would take you into environmental assessment or environmental impact statement territory.

So the way the rule is structured, the kind of NEPA compliance that will be required will depend upon how the Forest Service and the public working together craft a plan for the forest question. And the result, however that path is followed is going to be in full compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act.

MR. JIRON: Thanks, Fred. We've been at this for a few minutes. I'm going to ask Associate Chief Collins just to make a brief recap. And the reason we're doing that is that we have many callers calling in right now, many reporters interested in this. So she'll just hit a couple of issues that we've heard, and then we'll continue on with questions.

MS. COLLINS: Yes. I apologize if people have missed some of these questions. We've had questions concerning public involvement and how we're involving the public more in this process. And I think we can recap that in a couple of ways--one, by saying we're involving them early in a different way throughout the process with less time, consuming process for the participants. And that is very different from what we've had in the past.

We've had a lot of questions about the National Environmental Policy Act and compliance with that. And I think Fred has done a nice job of recapping that it's varied depending upon the kind of decisions that are made in the plan what NEPA analysis you will do. But clearly the law will be complied with in any way, shape or form in any choice that we make there.

We've talked about the cost reductions, and we know that we'll have a significant cost reduction with this new rule in place.

We've talked about the fact that no action like creating a ski area or cutting trees, any of those kinds of actions, will happen as a result of this planning rule. That will take place in subsequent decisions that are made at a more site-specific level.

And we've also talked about the international protocols that we're bringing into

this national process. And because we're so much a part of an international world, particularly in the natural resource arena, we really felt that we needed to adopt some international standards. And that's what we're doing--a process that is pretty revolutionary to us in terms of accountability, the environmental management system, where we have independent audit of all the work we're doing that is transparent to the public and certainly a model for how to get good accountability on the ground.

That's a quick recap of what I think you've heard so far.

MR. JIRON: Okay. Let's go back to questions.

Let's go to John Bartlett, Area Times News.

REPORTER: Thank you. I have, actually I'm going to package this as a couple of combined questions. Will the plans that result from this new rule look different than the plans that we have seen, say, for the Allegheny National Forest, that are in the revision process? Their existing plan is like 15 years old.

Will the new plans look different?

You've talked about the new rule and its look at broad public involvement. But in the planning process itself, are we embarking on a new era? Is it going to be a landscape base, ecological base, or will it continue with almost a zoning process that you've seen in existing plans?

MS. COLLINS: That's a really great question. And I think I'm going to turn that over to Rick Cables to answer. Are you on there, Rick?

MR. CABLES: Yes. Can you hear me?

MS. COLLINS: Yes.

MR. CABLES: Well, John, in answer to your first question will the plans look different, I think they absolutely will look different. They're going to be very much more of a strategic plan where we really spend time describing the desired condition of the land next decade and a couple decades out.

And the dialog with the public is not so much about scheduled projects and this sort of thing which is historically what we've done, but more about what does the land and the landscape look like in the future? What do we want it to look like? And the monitoring protocols and the EMS system will be set up that will allow us to track, are we making progress toward that desired future?

And so it's a more strategic document. It's not going to be laden with all these tables about different schedules in different program areas like we've had in the past. And I think hopefully it's going to be a lot more user friendly and easier for the public to

relate to and just see where we're headed.

As far as the second part of the question, there is an element of "zoning" involved in any planning because partly we have to decide where we're going to allow certain uses. Obviously in congressionally designated wilderness for example we're supposed to manage those lands as pristine and as natural as possible. Then there are other parts of the forest where we can allow for different uses and still meet the sustainability requirements of this planning.

But an underlying principle is looking across the landscape. The species requirements, for example, are going to move us away from individual species focus, and while we're going to consider that still we're also going to look at the whole landscape and the habitats that are going to nurture a whole suite of species.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thanks for that, Rick.

Let's go to Ellyn Ferguson of Gannett News Service.

REPORTER: I think maybe Mr. Cables started to kind of partly answer my question, which is, what specifically in the new rule would speed up the process and reduce the number of years and the cost of putting together a plan?

MS. COLLINS: Fred, do you want to answer that?

MR. NORBURY: I think there's at least a couple of principle elements that will help us in reducing the cost. One of them is what--this is what Rick talked about--where we are trying to take an holistic look across landscapes, look at whole ecosystems, and get more focused on what we want the land to look like; and less focus on specific projects, less focus on schedules of activities, less focus on budget levels, all those operational sorts of things. Instead, focus on what do people want to see on their national forests?

That's just a simpler and more meaningful process to run, and we think we can get through quicker and have people happier with the results.

The other thing that will help us with the cost is the increased flexibility that we've built into the rule as to how the plans will comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. Past rules have always required an environmental impact statement in every single situation. This rule doesn't do that. This rule says, you go back to the regulations issued by the Council of Environmental Quality to determine how much and what kind of environmental documentation you need to do.

The third thing that will help out in that respect is the environmental management system, because the environmental management system is a byproduct of demanding accountability for our managers, will build a better information base for us to use that will be available to the planners when they start working with the public in doing these

plans. So we think the planning process itself will be better informed with data, have better analysis to rest on, and will ultimately result in significantly reduced costs.

And that will help us serve the overall objective we're pursuing here, and we can't lose sight of it, which is clean air, clean water, abundant wildlife. Those are the things that we believe the people want to see in their national forests.

MR. JIRON: Thanks for that, Fred.

Let's go to John Jenson of the Record Bee.

REPORTER: Hi, everybody. In terms of international protocols and agreements, given the reluctance to agree with other nations what is the specific name of this agreement that I could look it up?

And who exactly from the public will be invited? How will the public participate exactly?

And--well, let's start with those for right now.

MS. COLLINS: There are a lot of books out there on environmental management systems, but as the ISO 14,001 process that directs the international protocol for environmental management systems--if you get on the website and get about 25 books coming up right away on how to do that.

So there's a lot, and a huge body of data about how that process works.

In terms of who gets involved in the process, it is very dependent on the communities in which these plans are being written, who's interested and who wants to be involved. It is a very open process, and it's a process that's inviting people of all walks of life to participate because if you can have a plan completed in two years as opposed to seven years, you don't have to get a babysitter every Saturday or Thursday night when the plan meetings are being held for seven years. It's a much more open and inviting process for people to participate in, in large part just because it's shorter and people are going to feel more embraced by it.

So it is open to everybody. And I don't know, Rick, if you have a thought on that?

MR. CABLES: Well, I think you just touched on it, Sally. I don't know how many just regular citizens have talked to me about our current process and how much time it takes, literally years-- five years, six years, seven years--of sticking with a planning process and trying to stay engaged.

And people have lives beyond that and things to do. So the only people that seem to be able to really stick with that are the paid folks from different organizations or

interest groups that are able because they're salaried people, paid to stay engaged.

We want a process that's open to regular citizens so that they can stick with it long enough, in addition to the folks representing interest groups, which is great.

But I really think that's a very fundamental and critical part of this reform is, we're just going to be able to have the greater chunk of people who really care about these wonderful natural forests and grasslands engage with us.

MR. JIRON: Thank you, Rick.

Let's go to Lee Garnet from Oregon Public Radio.

REPORTER: Let me follow up on what you were just talking about. Maybe you can give me a specific example here. It seems like you're shortening the public comment period, but you're saying that the public will be able to participate more. And I don't understand the new avenue that you're creating for that.

And finally, if you would just answer what the critics out here are saying that this is really all about more logging and fewer environmental impact statements.

MS. COLLINS: Fred, do you want to answer that?

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury again. One thing you said is not quite right. There's nothing in this rule that shortens the comment period. That's absolutely wrong. The comment, the length of the formal comment period--and they are established by the rule--are pretty much what they are right now.

What's shortened is the overall process, all that stuff that happens before the comment period and after the comment period. And that's what makes it easier for people to get involved, and that's what we believe gives people a more effective voice in the management of the national forests.

With respect to your other question on logging, this is something that Sally touched on earlier. This planning process is not about logging. It is not making decisions about timber sales. That happens after the planning process is done, after we've decided what kind of landscapes we want to have, what kind of conditions we want the land to be in, after we've decided how we want to leave the land. That's when people will start designing timber sales. When those timber sales are designed, they're going to get environmental impact statements and environmental assessments just like they do now. There's nothing in this rule that will affect that.

That's one of the reasons why we believe, we think this rule, particularly through the way it combines NEPA and the Environmental Management System, creates a better way to protect the environment.

MR. JIRON: Thank you, Fred.

Let's go to John Murray at Clark Fork Chronicle.

REPORTER: Hi. Sally talked a little bit about a formal definition of sustainability that would take into account social and economic components as well as ecological. Can you go into more detail about what that means? Does that suggest that instead of like an ASQ with an upper level of timber harvests there might be a guaranteed amount?

MS. COLLINS: The whole notion of sustainability having social, economic and ecological components is really looking at a community in which a forest resides and seeing what sustains that community, what sustains that forest, what sustains that grassland. And usually there's an interplay between all of those.

And it's not always about what is on the national forests; it's that area surrounding that national forest that also provides sustainability.

Now the concerns around what actions are or are not in this rule, there is no allowable sale quantity in this planning rule at all anymore. When we look to providing for clean air and clean water, when we look to providing diversity of species and a rich, abundant wildlife habitat, we're really looking across the board at those threats to those values we care about.

And this planning rule, somebody said earlier we are embarking on a new era. I would say we are embarking on a new era because this planning rule is squarely dealing with processes that threaten those resources we love and care about.

Issues such as a loss of habitat and diversity because of invasive species, the loss of fish habitat due to soil erosion from fires, increased sedimentation as a result of unmanaged outdoor recreation, those are the kind of threats to our resources that we're really concerned about today.

So when we're looking at sustainability, we're looking at all of those components that really affect the quality of life in an area, the social quality of life, the environmental quality of life, and then how people can sustain a lifestyle in that area based on that quality of life.

MR. JIRON: Okay. Thank you very much, Sally.

And we're going to take a few more questions, look like some follow-ups. So let's go to Theo Stine, Denver Post.

REPORTER: This question gets back to the decision to no longer require environmental impact statements for forest plans. If EISs are only required for individual projects, how would the Forest Service address the cumulative effects of that suite of

projects or goals that will be implemented through projects across a larger forest? Will there be a mechanism to address the total impact of a multiple logging or fire reduction project-- for example, on the Pike San Isabel Forest in Colorado?

MS. COLLINS: That's great. I wonder if we should let Rick answer that question since he talked about the Pike San Isabel. Rick used to be forest supervisor down there.

MR. CABLES: Well, Theo, first of all the rule does not say that there won't be an EIS. That is still a possibility depending on circumstances, as Fred talked about earlier. So again, the issue mostly is complying with the National Environmental Policy Act, which this rule fully does, and give some choices depending on the circumstances, which has been built into NEPA since its inception in 1969.

Looking at your question about cumulative effects, any of our projects if it's a large-scale fuel treatment project or forest restoration project like the example you cited on the front range of Colorado, we've got to disclose in the environmental documents for that project or suite of projects all of the cumulative effects that occur with that--be they effects on air quality, wildlife habitats across private lands and our lands when they're adjacent to each other, and all of those sorts of things.

So I see no loss or nothing except the ability to continue to do that and disclose those effects, which we are obligated to do by law and will continue to do.

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury. I'd like to add something to that. The logic of the Environmental Management System gives us some additional benefits in this area because the Environmental Management System requires you to continuously monitor what's actually happening and to collect information on what's happening and to evaluate that.

The Environmental Management System creates a body of information of cumulative effects that's constantly updated and constantly available for all the projects that are being carried out on the forest--which is part of the reason why I said earlier I believe that the way the National Environmental Policy Act works together with the Environmental Management System with this rule we have created a better way to project the environment.

MS. COLLINS: I thought I'd ask Ann to address that because mostly what we deal with was cumulative effects analysis is the science that we bring in to evaluate cumulative effects. Maybe you have a comment on that?

DR. BARTUSKA: Yes, Sally. Thanks for bringing that up. I think that's one of the opportunities we have here with the new rule is to ensure and have a mechanism to ensure that as the responsible official makes decisions about the plan and goes forward with the plan that science is at the table and that we have the tools and the techniques and the knowledge at multiple scales to be evaluating both the threats and then the opportunities associated with that landscape.



And so I think the requirement that you have science involved early on and that we have a continual process of looking at the linkage between what science is showing and with the linkage to management through the EMS process and the monitoring if it reinforces that the best science will be brought to the table as the decisions are made.

MR. JIRON: Thank you very much, Dr. Bartuska.

Let's go to Ellyn Ferguson at Gannet.

REPORTER: I just wanted to be clear on the answer I got a little while ago. It sounds as though the plans for the individual forests are going to be essentially big picture documents with details to come later. Is that essentially what we're talking about?

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury. It depends on what you mean by big picture details, I suppose. We believe these plans are going to be more--as Rick said earlier, they're going to look different than the plans we've had in the past. They're going to be more strategic, they're going to focus on what we're trying to achieve in terms of the conditions on the land and the ecosystems on the land. And there's going to be less detail about individual projects that might be carried out during the 15-year life of the plan.

One of the things we've learned over the past two decades is, our expectations at the start of the 15-year process are rarely realized, so that all that detail we've put in plans in the past about individual projects that might occur during the life of the plan end up being wrong because the projects don't occur, things change, conditions change, issues change, new scientific information comes along.

So that amount of detail has not served us well, has not served the public well. That's why we're trying to make this planning process more strategic and more focused on what we want to leave on the land, and the condition that we want the land to be in.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thank you, Fred.

Let's go to Glen Martin from the San Francisco Chronicle.

REPORTER: Hi. Actually a lot of my questions have been answered. But just to expand on the last question, I think I need a little clarification too. So basically the emphasis now, there are going to be no longer any directives that we might have seen in the past administrations such as we want to emphasize the preservation of old-growth systems, but now the action is going to shift down to the regional level or even the individual forest level and everyone's going to be considering what they want their landscape to look at and the individual forest or in the general region. Right? And there's going to be no significant directive from Washington?

MR. CABLES: Can I take a shot at that, Sally?

MS. COLLINS: Sure, Rick.

MR. CABLES: Glen, I don't -- maybe we're not being clear enough. For example, your example on old-growth systems, if the public and the public includes not only the local public but the regional and national public because these are national assets here, national public lands -- so no one's precluded. Just because the decision-maker now is a forest supervisor versus a regional forester doesn't change anything about who's involved in the process.

So the whole spectrum of interests will continue to be involved if they choose to. But your specific example on old-growth is a good one. If the public involved with us in defining this desired future says that we want to have X amount of old-growth systems and X amount of riparian areas and X amount of stream with a certain water quality, that becomes the desired condition we're trying to achieve. We put that down in black and white. There's a system of monitoring that's far stronger than the current system that holds us accountable, and it's completely transparent so anybody can see it and monitor our monitoring.

And the question is, are we moving towards that desired condition? So if the desired condition that the public wants is more old-growth systems, then that's what we set down on paper, we define it, and then we monitor ourselves, and in full daylight our EMS system presents it to see are we making progress towards that end.

MS. COLLINS: Again, just to reiterate, the goal is to provide for clean air and water, abundant wildlife, recreation opportunities, all of that suite of activities out there that the American people have told us they want to see.

So that's part of it as well.

MR. JIRON: Thank you. Let's go to Seth Borenstein from Knight Ridder.

REPORTER: Sorry again for the same explanation, I haven't seen this yet, and it's still not up on the website. By the way on the website it's still got the 2002 proposed changes.

Going to one of the specific concerns the groups have had about the proposal about the eliminating the species viability requirement plan, are you eliminating that because you're looking at the bigger picture instead of individual species requirement plan?

And if so, what's the reasoning behind that?

MS. COLLINS: Let me just start out and I'll turn it over to Fred. But clearly our goal here is to provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and using the absolute best available science we've got. And our scientists have been involved in coming up with a protocol and approach for species management that is in the planning

rule right now. And it calls for a sort of two-tier approach, a larger landscape look, so that you're looking at the context within which species operate, and you're looking at the whole suite of species within that environment and the interactions of those as well as if you've got a species of concern that may slip through the cracks. You're looking at that on a species-by-species basis.

So it's really bringing contemporary science into our planning process, contemporary thinking about how to provide and protect for species.

And I don't know if Ann or Fred have another comment to make about that, but that is what this rule does.

MR. NORBURY: I'd just say that that rule should be up on the web for you to look at later today.

For those of you who have been tracking this issue, the proposed rule we put out 2002 had two options for dealing with diversity of plant and animal communities. And the final rule takes features of both those options and blends them together into something that we think is scientifically sound and in accordance with current thinking on the best way to provide for ecosystem diversity across the landscape.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thanks very much.

Let's go to John Jenson from the Record Bee.

REPORTER: I'm curious about, there's been a lot of disagreement about what is "credible science." So I'd like to know at what level will credible scientists be chosen, and how will that term be defined?

MS. COLLINS: Ann, do you want to take that?

DR. BARTUSKA: Yes, this is Ann Bartuska. We have multiple ways of getting science to the table. Some of it is through studies, peer-reviewed, the traditional way of looking at research, so that will be through our own scientists. Some hopefully will be drawing upon the academic community who have a tremendous capacity out there to do those studies. And then getting that information into the hands of the manager in timely ways.

And that's partly the role that we in Forest Service research can play is ensuring that kind of information is in a format, is accessible, is in a tool that is very easily accessible by the manager.

But there are other ways that I think our science can come to table. It's not strictly studies. There's a vast array of literature out there. There are workshops and training sessions where you have scientists informing people on their own experience of what they're learning.

So all of those different tools will be brought to the table.

But fundamentally we are credible because we in the Forest Service abide by the traditional metrics of peer review that all the scientific community abides by. And there is no diminishment of that that I foresee in the future. And in fact I think the more exciting part is that because the role of science is so clear in this rule that it brings a higher level of obligation of the managers to be talking to the scientists and vice versa to get the really the best that we have in hand to those managers.

MR. JIRON: Thank you, Dr. Bartuska.

Let's go to Don Hopey from the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette.

REPORTER: Hi.

Given all these enhanced environmental controls and the goal of diversity in plant and animal communities, the landscape planning and this enhanced public participation, how does this rule or plan address the concerns of the timber industry that wants more access to public forest lands; and also, the concerns of residents near those forest lands who want more economic activity and more economic benefits from their national forests?

MS. COLLINS: This is Sally. I'd like to answer that question because I think it's a really important one. The suite of people in any community that have an interest in the national forest is very broad. People have lots of different interests. There are communities much more dependent on national forest resources than others. The ski community is a great example of that. Many of the ski areas are on national forest lands in this country.

And certainly forest-dependent communities are the same way, although those are fewer and fewer out there. But there are those people at the table as well.

And I would just say this. As we look together across that landscape at what uses, what we want that desired condition to be, what we're finding and what we're seeing--and Rick clearly has seen this in Colorado--we're seeing that as we look to actions to take us to that desired condition we often have opportunities to bring interests together.

If we're thinning trees to reduce hazardous fuels, we might have a commercial byproduct of that effort that could be used by somebody, smaller-diameter material. That, we're looking at more and more potential biomass plants that could take some of that extra material that's out there in the woods that could provide some jobs on a small scale in some of these rural communities and help to support a lifestyle in a rural community and also protect the land and provide for sustainability on that national forest or grassland.

So again, when you actually start putting the interests together at a table, you can often find a lot of win/win solutions that work for everybody.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thank you, Sally.

Let's go to Lee Garnet, Oregon Public Radio.

REPORTER: What are the new mechanisms, if any, that you're introducing to get more public involvement? And have you changed the way that you'll measure public comments such as giving greater weight to adjacent rural communities that are next to the federal forests?

MS. COLLINS: Fred, do you want to take that?

MR. NORBURY: We're not trying to prescribe in this rule the specific mechanisms that forest supervisors are going to have to use on different forests because communities are different. And what works for a small community in eastern Oregon is not going to work in the Los Angeles Basin where we've got five national forests. They're just very, very different; and you have to use different techniques to involve the public and to give them an effective voice in the process.

So we do want that flexibility. We do think that flexibility is essential if the public is going to be effectively involved.

In terms of measuring comments, we're not going to change our treatment of comments. The commenting process is not a voting process, never has been a voting process. That is going to be carried over the same, just like we've been doing for 20 years.

What we do hope though is that with the flexibility we have in how we involve the public we can have people spend more time actually talking to each other and working out solutions that are in the common interest rather than writing messages on pieces of paper or e-mails and mailing them in someplace to be counted.

MR. JIRON: Okay. We're going to be running out of time soon. Let's go to Greg Lemon, Ravelli Republic.

REPORTER: Yeah. I've got a couple of questions. One of the things that's come up in the Bitterroot Valley Restoration Act, there's a project here that's being piled underneath the act, involves shortening up the timeframe from planning to actual implementation--which sounds like what this rule is doing as well. It seems to do that by eliminating the amount of alternatives the Forest Service can consider after a draft proposal is released. Is that the way this is going to shorten, this rule shortens the timeframe? And if that's not, then how does it specifically shorten the timeframe for the public?

MR. NORBURY: This is Fred Norbury again. I guess I could go back over we offered earlier. I think because it gives you the essential feature in why it shortens the

timeframe is it gives you more flexibility in how you comply with the National Environmental Policy Act. And it also through the Environmental Management System creates a better database that's available to support the planning.

And so we think those two features alone will create a significant shortening of the process.

The alternative--this is different and unconnected with the Healthy Forest Restoration Act. The Healthy Forest Restoration Act is about projects. This is about plans. There is some more flexibility in how you'll develop alternatives in this.

What we're trying to do is develop alternatives collaboratively with the public. And we're creating additional ways in which we can explore alternatives with the public, and we think that flexibility as just part of the overall flexibility is not limiting the number of alternatives. In fact we think that quite likely the number of alternatives the public will see under this approach may very well increase over what they've seen in the past. So we think the flexibility itself will enhance the public involvement and give the public a better voice than what they've had in the past.

MR. JIRON: Okay, thanks very much, Fred. We are out of time for today. I'm going to turn it over to Sally Collins for just a brief last remark. If you have follow-up questions after today's teleconference you can phone me at 202-205-0896 for additional information or anything that we can help you on this.

So anyway, Sally.

MS. COLLINS: Yes. Let me just conclude by saying that we really are excited in the Forest Service about this new rule in large part because it's a rule for the 21st Century. It really will take us into the decades ahead with the issues we're facing in the next 20, 30, 40 years. It's going to set us up to be able to respond quickly to issues like the threat of wildfire which are bigger, more dramatic, hotter than anything we've seen in recent decades, completely missed by the last planning process.

Invasive species. The threat to biodiversity that poses to all of us. It will, all of that, this rule will take us into that future. And as Rick Cables said and others have said before, the work we're doing on the land today is very different than what we were doing before, and we need a rule that responds to the times that we're in.

And we're very excited about being able to roll this out because we fundamentally believe we've got a better way to monitor, we've got a better way to protect the environment, and a better way to provide Americans with clean air and water, with recreation opportunities, with open natural areas that they love and care about, and abundant wildlife--all those things. I believe this plan will take us there. This planning rule will take us there.

Anyway, I appreciate you all taking the time this week. And once again, have a

happy holiday. Thank you.

MR. JIRON: Thank you very much.