Summary of Preliminary Revisions To the Proposed Forest Plan

September 29-30, 2008 Public Workshops

INTRODUCTION

This document provides an overview of public input and technical analysis completed to date and describes the scope of the revision to the proposed Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) Forest Plan. Key sources informing the revision of the Forest Plan include:

- Input received through the Pathway collaborative process
- Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER), and public comments received
- Requirements of the 2008 Planning Rule
- New scientific information

These are each discussed in the sections below.

PATHWAY COLLABORATIVE PROCESS

The LTBMU has been engaged in revising the Forest Plan and gathering public input and evaluating resource data and trends since 2004, beginning with the Pathway collaborative process. The scientific community, regional and community-based publics, tribal governments, and other interested parties have provided significant input through Pathway. This process included numerous technical working group reports and meetings, five public visioning workshops, one phone survey, eight focus group meetings, twelve community place-based workshops, and forty Pathway Forum stakeholder group meetings. Pathway reports are available online at http://www.pathway2007.org/.

Key documents produced in the Pathway process that inform the Forest Plan revision include:

- *Public Lands and Waterways Vision Summary*. Sept. 2006. This document was developed through a place-based planning process and provides a consolidated regional vision, overall planning themes, values and opportunities, guiding principles and key planning concepts for public lands in the Basin.
- *Pathway Evaluation Report & Technical Supplement*. April 2007. These documents provide scientific analysis of ten specific resource areas. They describe conditions and trends, and offer Vision, Desired Conditions, Standards, and Indicators Statements that were developed through a multi-agency, region-wide, consensus-seeking public process.
- *Tahoe Basin Regional Vision Summary*. July 2007. This document contains a regional vision for Lake Tahoe. It consolidates the various Pathway regional and place-based visioning efforts into a single document.
- *Lake Tahoe TMDL*. This multi-year analysis process seeks to bring new scientific data to explain Lake Tahoe's loss of water clarity and address possible pollutant load reduction schemes for fine particles, phosphorus, and nitrogen. http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb6/

Key inputs to the Forest Plan that have emerged from Pathway process are summarized in the table below.

Key Input from the Pathway Process incorporated into the Forest Plan
• *Regional vision statement and desired conditions*. A combined regional vision statement, individual resource desired conditions, and measurable indicators to track progress toward achieving desired conditions were produced during the Pathway process.
• *Regional transect approach to land use*. A land use management scheme stemming from community planning and using transect zoning for Urban Areas was developed in the Pathway process and extended to non-urban and National Forest System Lands in the Basin. These transects will be translated to management areas for the Forest Plan.
• *Scientific analysis of resource conditions and trends*. The Pathway process brought together recent scientific information on conditions and trends for water quality, soil conservation and stream environment zones, air quality, noise, transportation, wildlife and fisheries, vegetation, scenic quality, recreation and social economics. This information will be incorporated into the Forest Plan.
• *Regional adaptive management system.* This Pathway process seeks to develop a common set of indicators or measurements to report on the status of achieving resource objectives such as water clarity. Currently a work in progress, a pilot project with selected indicators will be used to develop a prototype monitoring plan. This prototype may inform the Forest Plan monitoring plan.

Additional details on key inputs from the Pathway process may be found in the documents listed above.

COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION REPORT

In accordance with federal regulatory requirements governing Forest Plan revision (36 CFR 219), the Forest Service produced a Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER) in February 2007. The CER summarized existing conditions and trends and described a need for change to the 1988 Forest Plan as amended. The process and documents can be found online at: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/forest-plan/what-is-forest-plan.shtml.

Scope of the Forest Plan Revision

The 1988 Forest Plan contains direction that is still valid today and includes recent amendments such as the Sierra Nevada Framework. After analysis of many needed changes, the Forest Supervisor for the LTBMU decided to limit the Forest Plan revision to areas where new or additional guidance is needed. The revision effort will focus on the following major topic areas identified through the CER process:

Restoring Degraded Watersheds
The need for a single Federal administrative voice and unified resource planning coordination was a principal reason why the LTBMU was established. The delicate watershed systems that resulted in the famed clarity of the lake were critically disturbed for more than a century, followed by rapid urban development in the 1960s and 1970s. Restoration also includes improving forest vegetation health and diversity, wildlife habitats, and fisheries, and the reintroduction of native species such as Lahontan cutthroat trout. Restoration usually improves the quality of recreational settings.

Reducing Hazardous Fuels and Restoring Forest Health
Catastrophic wildfire is a significant threat to the natural, scenic and community values within the Lake Tahoe Basin, including lake water clarity. Suppressing the natural process of fire has disrupted ecosystem structure and function as well as increased wildfire risks. Restoring fire to its natural role would be the most effective method for reducing fuels and restoring ecosystem health. However, human communities and infrastructure in the Basin limit the use of this alternative in many areas. Reducing forest densities and heavy fuel loading is a necessary first step towards forest ecosystem restoration in areas where fire cannot safely be used for restoration purposes. Additionally, growth rates of forest vegetation make maintaining existing treatments and implementing new treatments under current funding and staffing levels especially challenging. However, once fuel loads are under control, we can focus more on restoring forest stand structure and using prescribed fire to mimic natural disturbance. An additional challenge is to maintain and protect quality habitat for species that depend on late successional dense forest stand conditions. These habitat types are susceptible to high severity, stand replacement wildfire. Therefore, fuels treatments in adjacent stands may be necessary to reduce wildfire risk to these habitat areas, and consequently, may affect nearby habitat quality and connectivity. Forest health is also a significant factor in maintaining scenic values.

Recreation Management
The Lake Tahoe Basin is socially and economically dependent on recreation and tourism. The LTBMU, the primary land management agency, provides a wide variety of high quality outdoor recreation opportunities in a beautiful alpine setting. Maintaining recreation quality in the face of an expanding population of residents and visitors presents a number of management challenges. These challenges include protecting the scenic qualities of the landscape setting, improving the infrastructure necessary to support increasing visitor use, and protecting natural and cultural resources.

Land Use – Suitability of Areas
Determining the suitable uses for each part of the forest is a major part of land management planning. The suitable uses on the landscape can and do change over time. Land uses are influenced by recreation trends, social values, capacity, and the economics of communities. Suitable use designations must provide for a diversity of healthy ecosystems, protection of threatened and endangered plant and animal species, designated wilderness and special interest areas, resorts, ski areas, and other recreation opportunities, and permitted special uses such as utility corridors.

Planning and Adaptive Management
New science, new monitoring strategies, adaptive management, and environmental management systems have all developed since the original 1988 Forest Plan. In order to take advantage of future changes, the revised LTBMU Forest Plan will be a dynamic document. Planning will no longer be revisited every 15 years, but continuously. In order to keep pace with scientific and social change, active public-private collaborative planning will be necessary to identify changing issues and trends. This collaborative planning will include other key partner agencies, local governments, organizations and the public both inside and outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Public Comments Received on the CER

The public was provided with two opportunities to provide comment on the CER. These comments were focused on forest planning at a finer scale than was the case in the Pathway process. In response to publication of the CER, twenty-three individuals and organizations provided comment between October 2006 and March 2007. Additionally, the Pathway Forum members and the interest groups they represent submitted comments to a focused questionnaire distributed with the document release. Questions ranged in topics from recreation management, historical/cultural resources, special area designations, facilities/roads/trails, minerals/geology/groundwater, to commercial livestock grazing. Sixty-seven survey response letters were received in May, 2007.

A recurring theme in many of the comment letters was the need for clarification on planning direction and decision space within which the LTBMU operates. Specifically,

- What is the defined area of analysis?
- What science methodology is being used?
- Does the revised Plan tier to the products (Vision, DC's, Indicators, Place-based Planning) from Pathway?
- How does the Planning Rule satisfies NEPA requirements?
- What are the processes required by the Planning Rule?
- What is the purpose of the Comprehensive Evaluation Report?
- How will the proposed Plan incorporate Monitoring, Adaptive Management, and an Environmental Management System (EMS)?

Specific issues in response to the CER and questionnaire included the following:

- Recreation management
  - Will the Forest Service (FS) maintain and improve public access opportunities?
  - Capacity – How will the Forest manage crowds and overuse?
  - Will the FS provide public education about conservation and stewardship?
  - What roadless area rules apply to the Basin?
  - Will more areas be designated as wilderness?
  - Is there a wild & scenic river analysis?
  - What is the Wildland Fire Use policy? (Desolation Wilderness)
  - What are the outfitter guide permitting policies?
- Motorized/ Non-motorized Recreation conflicts
  - Will the plan address trail use conflicts between mountain bikes and hikers?
  - Will opportunities for snowmobiling be expanded?
  - Will snowmobile use in the Basin be eliminated?
  - Will the FS regulate and monitor noise generated by motorized use?
- How will previous planning decisions be incorporated into the new Forest Plan? i.e.
  - USFS Region 5 Management Indicator Species (MIS)
  - Sierra Nevada Forest Plan amendment
- Was the Lake Tahoe Watershed Assessment referenced?
- What is the legal relationship between the FS, TRPA, and Lahontan Water Board?
  - How will the FS adopt and use the Lake Tahoe TMDL?
  - Will the Forest Service adopt the TRPA thresholds?
- Will the FS withdraw minerals exploration?
- Will the FS close all commercial range allotments?

These comments along with comments and materials generated during this next round of public involvement will be will be taken into consideration during the planning process. These will help focus the second round of topic specific workshops.

2008 PLANNING RULE

In 2008, the Forest Service, at the national level, adopted a new planning rule to guide development of Forest Plans. The table below describes key changes to the Forest Plan due to the new Planning Rule.

Key Proposed Changes to Proposed Forest Plan based on 2008 Rule Guidance
• Reformat the current plan to a more strategic style plan. The Forest Plan Revision is developed under the **2008 planning rule** and will look considerably different than prescriptive 1982 style plans. Style, structure and format of plan has changed and is no longer prescriptive, i.e., does not make project level decisions and predict numerical outputs. Newer style plans focus on achieving **desired conditions** within a framework for contributions to ecological, social and economic sustainability. Specific **objectives** are developed to move toward the desired conditions and bounded by existing laws and regulations within set defined **guidelines**.
• Change the current **Management Area** approach, delineation and definition from 21 specific management areas with 57 practices, and 13 prescriptions to 5 broad management areas rooted in transect based planning (gradients of development or levels of ecological integrity) with generally suitable uses.
• Replace the current monitoring plan with a new adaptive management approach and monitoring program that will link to a regional management system.
• Link the LTBMU to a national strategy for Environmental Management System implementation.

NEW SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION

In the years since the last Forest Plan was adopted in 1988, there have been significant advances in the science governing forest management. Key proposed changes to the Forest Plan that stem from these scientific advances are summarized in the table below.

Key Proposed Changes based on New Scientific or Policy Information
Include a new Appropriate Management Response policy for fire management.
Replace the current limitation on 30” diameter breast height for tree removal with a more scientifically defensible ecosystem restoration approach to vegetation diversity. This approach may involve removal of certain individual trees of certain species to restore stand structure and condition that move toward higher quality wildlife habitat.
Replace the land allocations for Old Forest Emphasis Areas with more accurate current seral stage conditions while recognizing the dynamic nature of forest structure.
Home Range Core Areas (HCRA) for spotted owls are proposed to be dropped in the LTBMU while retaining Protected Activity Centers as the primary guidance for spotted owls and eliminating the need for HCRAs.
Apply Riparian Conservation Area (RCA) guidance to Stream Environment Zones and replace the RCA buffers with the SEZ concept.

SIERRA NEVADA FRAMEWORK

The 2004 Sierra Nevada Forest Plan Amendment (SNFPA) Framework provided expanded ecosystem goals and desired conditions. It amended forest plans throughout the Sierras to:

- Restore healthy vegetation conditions;
- Maintain physical, chemical, and biological processes in riparian and meadow lands that lead to healthy, self-sustaining ecosystems, and
- Address fire and fuels management to reduce fire hazard with consideration for topography, weather, fuels arrangements, strategic placement, and predicted post-treatment fire behavior.
    - Priority for fire management, fuels, and prescribed fire activities is given to areas of concentrated public use and urbanized development.
    - Almost one third of the LTBMU is within the Wildland Urban Intermix analyzed in the Framework.

The SNFPA amendment has already been fully incorporated into the 1988 Forest Plan as one of many amendments since 1988.

KEY INFORMATION NEEDS – TOPICS FOR FUTURE PUBLIC WORKSHOPS

Based on the public input received to date and the scope of revision described in the CER the Forest Service staff would like to focus the topics for future public workshops on:

- Restoring Degraded Watersheds
- Reducing Hazardous Fuels and Restoring Forest Health
- Recreation Management
- Results of the September 29-30 Public Workshops

Forest Service staff intends to convene follow-up public workshops focused specifically on these topics. These workshops will take place in November 2008.