



# Summary of Forest Plan Revision Process

## Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit September 2008 Public Workshops

### Purpose of document

This document provides an overview of the Forest Plan Revision Process and summarizes the work accomplished to date and next steps in the process.

### Where are we in the revision process?

The current U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU) Forest Plan dates back to 1988. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires an update every 15 years. While many of the goals from the existing plan remain the same, new management challenges have surfaced creating a need for a closer look at the Forest Plan. Driven by new scientific information and given the opportunity to participate in the Pathway process, the LTBMU decided to move forward with revision in 2004. After several years of participating in the Pathway collaborative, we are now embarking on a public participation effort focused solely on the LTBMU Forest Plan.

The planning rule procedures require that the LTBMU prepare a Comprehensive Evaluation Report (CER), the purpose of which is to describe resource and program trends and the need for change to the 1988 Forest Plan. Preparation of the CER is the first step in the Forest Plan revision process. The LTBMU published and released the CER for public comment in February 2007 under the 2005 Rule. Comments were received from 23 individuals and organizations and will be taken into consideration during the planning process. The 2005 Planning Rule was enjoined in April 2007. In April 2008 the current Planning Rule was released and the LTBMU staff issued a Notice of Adjustment (June 2, 2008) to continue the revision process using the original CER.

The timeline below summarizes public participation efforts to date in the Forest Plan Revision process and identifies key opportunities for public participation in the coming months.



## Will the revised plan look different?

Yes. Plan revisions are guided by National Forest Management Act and a new 2008 Planning Rule. The Planning Rule defines a structure for the revised plan, including five main components:

- ❑ Desired Conditions
- ❑ Objectives
- ❑ Suitability
- ❑ Guidelines
- ❑ Special Areas

When the final plan documents are complete, they will reflect a strategic, sustainable approach to the management of ecological, social and economic values. The result will be a less prescriptive and more strategic plan without specific project level decisions. The plan will define aspirational desired conditions and set achievable short term objectives within established guidelines bounded by laws and policies. Adaptive management, new science and monitoring information will be used to constantly update and adjust the plan.

Environmental analysis (NEPA) including public involvement is retained and focused at the project level.

## How much of the plan is being revised?

Most of the goals of the 1988 Forest Plan are still applicable and will be rolled into the revised plan. The required elements of the existing plan and the elements that are still effective in meeting long term goals and desired conditions will remain in the revised plan.

Based on public input received through the Pathway process, several key management challenges surfaced. The LTBMU decided to focus the scope of its plan revision on the following thematic topics:

- ❑ Restoration of degraded watersheds
- ❑ Reducing hazardous fuels and restoring forest health
- ❑ Recreation management
- ❑ Land use – suitability of areas
- ❑ Planning and adaptive management

The forest planning team will seek public input on all of these thematic topics.

## Decision making under a revised plan

Management decisions must be consistent with Forest Plan components. Forest Plans must be consistent with federal laws and policies and applicable local regulations, and must engage the public when projects are being planned. As noted earlier, NEPA analyses and public involvement will also inform project decisions.

Key laws and policies that guide decision making under the Forest Plan include the following:

Laws: Resources Planning Act, 1974  
National Forest Management Act, 1976  
Code of Federal Regulations, 36 CFR 219, 2008 Planning Rule

Policies:  
Forest Service Manuals (FSM)  
Forest Service Handbooks (FSH)

## The 2008 Planning Rule

The 2008 Planning Rule was published in the Federal Register, April 14, 2008. The new rule outlines an open public process for long-term planning for natural resource protection and recreation on national forests and grasslands nationwide. The 2008 Planning Rule was developed by Forest Service professional resource specialists, scientists and land managers after carefully considering 79,000 comments from other resource agencies and the public. The 2008 Planning Rule is much more strategic in nature and allows us to work directly with the public in a very open and transparent manner to more quickly address changing conditions and ensure resource protection.

Key elements of the 2008 Planning Rule include the following:

- **Ensures the protection of wildlife** and other resources by providing a framework to fully comply with all resource protection laws including the Endangered Species Act. It also includes language from the National Forest Management Act that ensures protections for soil and water, limits even-aged timber harvest methods and maximum size of openings in tree cover.
- **Expands public involvement and collaboration** by requiring early and frequent public dialogues in all phases of development, implementation and monitoring of plans. Public involvement under this rule exceeds the requirements set forth under the National Environmental Policy Act.
- **Allows for quicker response to changing conditions** such as those brought about by climate change or catastrophic events such as wildfire or hurricanes. This can be done on a local level to best meet the immediate needs of the forest and nearby communities.
- **Fully complies with the National Environmental Policy Act.** The new rule requires the Forest Service units to disclose the environmental affects of a proposed forest plan using the appropriate level of analysis and documentation. This could be an environmental impact statement (EIS), an environmental assessment (EA) or a categorical exclusion (CE), depending on the character of the proposed plan. Public collaboration and involvement is required for all of these, including the CE.
  - Allows standards to be a component of forest plans in response to public comments.
  - Requires an Environmental Management System to be established prior to on-the-ground project implementation.
  - Makes forest plans more responsive to changing environmental conditions and new advances in science and technology.

## Tahoe Basin environmental regulations apply

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board and the Nevada Division of Environmental Protection also have environmental regulations that apply to Forest Service projects. In many cases, projects are reviewed by the appropriate agency, and in some cases, permits must be acquired from agencies in order to conduct certain projects. The plan revision takes these Lake Tahoe Basin regulations into account through various inter-agency agreements.

### To learn more about the Forest Plan Revision Process visit:

LTBMU Plan Revision Homepage:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lbmu/forest-plan/>

To view the complete Comprehensive Evaluation Report visit:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/lbmu/forest-plan/cer/cer-index.shtml>