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Service

Black Hills  
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Forest

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# BLACKHILLS NATIONAL FOREST



Weed treatment in the Jasper Fire area, summer 2002

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## 2002 MONITORING AND FIVE- YEAR EVALUATION REPORT

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# **Black Hills Forest Plan**

## **Monitoring and Five-Year Evaluation Report**

### **Fiscal Year 2002**

**(October 2001 through September 2002)**

### **What This Document Is:**

This is the annual monitoring and evaluation report for the Black Hills Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan.). A revision of the Forest Plan was completed in June 1997. The first amendment to this Forest Plan was completed in May 2001. The 2002 Monitoring Report incorporates the Five-Year Evaluation of the Forest Plan required by the National Forest Management Act (36 CFR 219.10g - ....“The Forest Supervisor shall review the conditions on the land covered by the plan at least every 5 years to determine whether conditions or demands of the public have changed significantly.”)

The basis for the annual monitoring report is in Chapter Four of the Forest Plan. This report does not discuss the entire inventory and monitoring that occurs in the Black Hills, but only that monitoring information related to the Forest Plan. More detailed studies may occur in association with individual projects that implement the Forest Plan. When relevant to Forestwide trends, information from these site-specific projects is incorporated into Forestwide monitoring.

The Black Hills Monitoring and Evaluation Report focuses on effectiveness monitoring, which focuses on whether or not the Forest is meeting or moving toward established objectives set forth in the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan. Implementation monitoring or monitoring to insure standards and guidelines are implemented as directed in the Plan are a minor part of this monitoring report. The Washington Office (WO) appeal decision on the 1997 Land and Resource Management Plan directed the Forest to conduct more intensive monitoring than was originally in the 1997 plan.

The Forest has developed a "Monitoring Implementation Guide" to describe methods on how to implement the monitoring and evaluation requirements of the Revised Plan; see <http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills/projects/planning/2001Monitor/MonGuide.pdf>

Several different environmental factors are monitored each year; however, not every item is scheduled for evaluation and reporting on an annual basis. Chapter Four of the Forest Plan indicates how often each item is reported.

The implementation of the Forest Plan is discussed in the appendix of this report. The goals and objectives of the 1997 Revised Forest Plan are listed along with accomplishments in fiscal year 2002 (FY2002).

Supporting documentation for this report is located in the Supervisor's Office, Black Hills National Forest.

### **Five-Year Evaluation Findings:**

- The Forest has accomplished less than 25 percent of the prescribed burning objective in the Forest Plan over the last five years, but has exceeded the historic annual level of wildfire acreage.
- The Forest has offered 30 percent of the decade 1 sawtimber volume allowed by the 1997 Forest Plan. On an average annual basis, the Forest has offered 61 percent of general allowable sale quantity (ASQ) Objective 303 and zero percent of Objective 305, the Norbeck non-interchangeable component allowable sale quantity, over the first five years of the Forest Plan. POL (products other than logs) is

included in the total program upon contract award or when contracts are modified.

- Mountain Pine beetle (MPB) infestations are continuing to spread along with those of other insects. The Forest's ability to manage for reduced insect risk is limited due to funding, the time it takes to set up a timber sale or other treatment project, legal considerations (NEPA process), and contract length. The situation is improving with increased funding, changes in legal and policy requirements, and industry cooperation.
- Specific riparian restoration has occurred on less than 20 acres. The acreage of riparian restoration will fall well short of the 500-acre objective at the current rate of implementation.
- The protocols for sensitive plants have been recently implemented, and it will be a number of years before a statistical statement for trend can be made. The number of years before a statistical trend statement can be made will vary by species. The trend may be difficult to establish and may not even be possible for some plant species because of species characteristics such as dormancy, etc.
- Fisheries nonstructural accomplishments (acres enhanced/restored) did not meet the objective in any year because of the high cost-per-acre of desired treatments, e.g. dredging, and the limited Fisheries Program funding. Fisheries structural accomplishments were reported in miles of streams enhanced/restored rather than as structures, so it was not possible to evaluate if this objective was met. However, the 27 miles of streams enhanced or restored in the past 5 years suggests significant accomplishment of the structural objective.
- The primary heritage program concern at this time is the protection of heritage sites during project implementation. Damage to sites and project delays have occurred. Project implementation needs to include review of project designs and mitigation measures.
- Wilderness trail counts in 2002 were approximately 35,994 recreation-visitor-days (RVD) of which the majority occurred on Harney Peak, Trail 9. The Forest Plan provides a guideline of an estimated carrying capacity of 32,100 RVDs of use for the entire wilderness. At this time, the trail counter data is not reliable enough to take management actions to limit use. Hell Canyon Ranger District has implemented two activities to improve the reliability of wilderness use estimates and assist in redirecting some use away from the wilderness. The National Visitor Use Monitoring effort occurring throughout the Black Hills National Forest in FY 2003 includes a wilderness use component.
- The Forest has acquired 15 percent of the Forest Plan right-of-way objective in the first 5 years of the 1997 Forest Plan.
- Net operating costs for Fiscal Year 2002 were \$31.4 million compared to \$3.7 million in 1998. Revenues totaling \$9.3 million in 2002, down from \$17.0 million in 1998, were affected by a decline in national timber market prices. Program costs totaled \$40.7 million in 2002 compared to \$20.7 million in 1998. Of the 2002 expenditures \$10 million was for fire suppression compared to less than \$1 million in 1998. In 2002, \$2.5 million was expended for fire restoration and rehabilitation resulting from the 2000 Jasper Fire.
- Both fire suppression and fire restoration and rehabilitation are unplanned expenses and are not annual budget items. Between 1998 and 2002, increases were seen in fire management, hazardous fuel reduction, timber management, environmental analysis, and Forest Planning. Fluctuation in programs such as fire management (\$14,000,000 in costs), changing market price for timber (a decline from \$17,000,000 in timber receipts in 1988 to \$9,000,000 in 2002), and the increased costs of environmental analysis and mitigation in project planning are a few of the factors causing increased net operating costs.
- Forest Plan objectives should use the same unit of measure (acres or miles) used for the annual accomplishment reporting. Either additional funding or a complete reprioritization of funding within the Wildlife, Fish, and Rare Plants Program is needed to accomplish the fisheries nonstructural objective because of the high cost per project. A reduction in Knutson-Vandenberg funds would likely result in a reduction of nonstructural wildlife accomplishments.
- Forestwide snag density goals are met, although distribution across watersheds is uncertain.



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Hardwood snag density objectives may need to be reviewed as to whether six snags per acre is a realistic objective. Snag monitoring methods may need to be revised or employed more vigorously in order to more precisely measure conditions. The complicated language regarding aspect, species composition, size class, and decay class are difficult to measure and track. Therefore, any future direction regarding desired snag conditions should attempt to simplify these measures while retaining the intent established under current objectives. Project-level snag measurements are not always conducted; instead, projects are designed to leave all snags (Standard 2304) and provide green tree replacements (Standard 2306).

- Recent large fires have changed the appearance of the existing scenic integrity beyond our control. An accounting of these changes from wildfires has not been tallied to date.

### Forest Plan Amendments:

The Black Hills National Forest has undertaken changes to the 1997 Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan). These changes, or amendments, are in response to direction from the Chief of the Forest Service in his October 1999 decision on various appeals of the Revised Plan and to the settlement agreement stemming from the Veteran Salvage Timber Sale lawsuit. These changes are being accomplished in two phases.

In late August 2000, the Forest Service signed an agreement with several groups settling a lawsuit filed in November 1999. The lawsuit challenged implementation of certain projects on the Forest. Because of the settlement agreement, changes must be made to certain timber sales under contract and certain sales not yet sold, which are covered in the scope of the agreement. The Forest is continuing to make these changes as required.

The Phase I Amendment was completed, and the Regional Forester issued the decision in May 2001. This amendment contains interim protections for a variety of wildlife and plant species and allows the Forest to proceed with some limited project decisions for the next two to five years. The Phase I Amendment decision was appealed but was upheld on review.

The Phase II Amendment process was officially initiated on November 28, 2001. Scoping comments were requested by January 28, 2002. The focus of this amendment is broader than that of Phase I and includes investigating strategies to address risks from fire, insects, and disease; reviewing protections for a variety of plant and animal species; determining appropriate timber harvest volumes; and evaluating and designating research natural areas as appropriate. This significant amendment is targeted for completion in 2004.

Visit the Black Hills National Forest website at [www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/blackhills) for ongoing information.

1/s/ Brad Exton (for)  
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January 29, 2004  
Date