

Forest Service Planning Rules

The 1976 National Forest Management Act requires a Land and Resource Management Plan (forest plan) for each national forest. The Forest Service implemented forest planning regulations in 1982. Those regulations were used for most of the first round of forest plans. In 1989, the Forest Service began working on an update to the forest planning regulations based on their experience implementing the 1982 regulations and what they saw as future forest planning needs.

Under the 1982 rules, plans sometimes took 8 years (or more) and millions of dollars to complete. Since forest plans are supposed to cover a period of not more than 10 years, the process clearly needed significant reform.

A new rule was published in 2000. However, the Forest Service quickly realized that the 2000 planning regulations were unworkable and initiated development of new regulations in 2002. A new planning rule was finalized in January 2005. In 2007, those regulations were suspended by court order, pending completion of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis. Following NEPA analysis, new forest planning regulations were published in April 2008. Several environmental groups promptly filed lawsuits against the new regulations.

A decision to initiate another revision of the forest planning rules would mean that the rules have been in a state of flux for almost two decades. One of the chief objectives of the forest planning process is to provide the public with a meaningful opportunity for input into the management of their lands. A 20 year odyssey in which the rules of the game have constantly changed has severely undermined this objective. It has practically eliminated any incentive for the public to participate in the process.

The 2008 regulations represent the Forest Service's best attempt to develop and implement updated forest planning regulations using the best available science.

Recommendations:

Retain, implement and vigorously defend the 2008 forest planning regulations.

The American Forest Resource Association (AFRC), headquartered in Portland, Oregon, represents nearly 80 forest products businesses and forest landowners in twelve states, primarily in Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho and Montana. Its mission is to create a favorable operating environment for the forest products industry, ensure a reliable timber supply from public and private lands, and promote sustainable management of forests by improving federal laws, regulations, policies and decisions that determine or influence the management of all lands. For information call 503-222-9505.

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