

Collaborative Restoration Workshop

National Forest Foundation | April 2016

Planning | Forest Planning Under the 2012 Rule: Early Lessons in Planning and Collaboration

Key Topics: Forest Planning 2012 Rule, Collaborative Capacity

Speakers

- **Susan Jane Brown**, Western Environmental Law Center (WELC), Planning Rule FACA Committee
- **Karen DiBari**, Director of Conservation Connect, National Forest Foundation
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- **James Melonas**, Deputy Forest Supervisor, Nantahala & Pisgah National Forests

Overview

Forest planning under the 2012 rule has expanded the role of public participation and collaboration. Instead of reserving public participation only for the NEPA process, the 2012 rule encourages public engagement throughout all stages of forest planning. National Forests have learned worthwhile lessons as they have started engaging the public in forest planning processes.

What has changed and what are the benefits

- The standards for public engagement require that the Forest Service include diverse stakeholders throughout all phases of the planning process. The public is to be involved in the *development* of the plan, not simply in the review process. Public input should play an important role in:
 - Assessments
 - Plan Development
 - Commenting on the Draft EIS
 - Objection process
 - Development of the monitoring program
- Public engagement in planning can improve the robustness of the plan, allow for corrections along the way, and build understanding around areas of conflict and amongst stakeholders.
- Above all, public engagement provides an opportunity to build strong relationships between the Forest Service and stakeholders.

Types of Public Participation

There are many ways the Forest Service can engage the public in the planning process. These strategies form a spectrum of public engagement, from collaborative workgroups to information dissemination. Collaboration is to be used where feasible and appropriate, but other types of public engagement are important where in-depth collaboration is not applicable.



Explore more: nationalforests.org/crw

Level	Examples of Agency Activities and Tools
Collaborate	Directly engage the public to exchange information with each other and work together on one or more issues during the planning process. Identify where there is agreement and disagreement. Potential tools: Facilitated or mediated discussion among public participants, Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) groups, and partnerships.
Involve	Work closely with interested members of the public to clarify concerns and seek feedback on how to meet challenges presented by the planning process. Potential tools: workshops, partnerships, and public meetings.
Consult	Provide information to the public and seek suggestions as well as feedback on potential issues and concerns. Potential tools: open house, public meeting, notice and comment, news release, and website.
Inform	Provide sufficient objective information to the public to convey an understanding of intended actions, processes, and preliminary issues. Potential tools: fact sheet, newsletter, mailing, news release, and website.

Tips for Constructive Public Engagement

- Process education is very important.
 - New stakeholders are often inexperienced with forest planning processes and collaborative meeting processes in general. Take the time educate stakeholders on the process and introduce them to relevant features of the Forest Service’s work.
 - Stakeholders often view planning as a very high stakes process, determining the fate of their interests in the forest. Participants may come ready to express their dissatisfaction with previous management actions and prepared to stringently defend their interests. High pressure situations can often be diffused by explaining the planning scope and process in more detail.
- Allow for time. When seeking a response from stakeholders, give them early notification and ample time to develop feedback. Recognize that sudden comment deadlines can be flashpoints for conflict.
- Narrow the focus of the engagement. Feedback will be far more useful if it is restricted to specific topics and objectives of the planning process.
- Provide proposals and options. Rather than simply asking for recommendations, stakeholders can provide more in-depth feedback when they are asked to respond to specific proposals or to choose between detailed options.
- Be transparent. Sharing information about the planning process and Forest Service restrictions helps to build trust and focus the conversation on the most beneficial topics.

Resources

- [USFS 2012 Planning Rule Proposed Directives, Forest Service Handbook, Chapter 40, Public Participation](#) – pp. 16-34
- [Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests Plan Revision Home Page](#)
- [San Gabriel Mountains Community Collaborative](#)

