2 COUNTY GOVERNMENTS AND THE KOOTENAI NATIONAL FOREST

National Forests have unique relationships with other governmental entities, including tribal and county governments. County governments have multiple interests in the federal lands within their boundaries. These interests include how federally owned lands affect the fiscal conditions within the county as well as interests in how federal land management influences the quality of life and resources for social and economic adaptation. These multiple interests suggest that the relationship of county government with the KNF is a topic of special concern for both County Commissioners and KNF line officers and staff. In this chapter we provide an overview of the current relationship between the counties and the KNF, including a brief description of the structure of county government, the fiscal interests of the counties in the KNF, and county evaluations and expectations about their current and future relationship with the KNF.

2.1 Local Government Structure and Political Constituents

Lincoln and Sanders counties each have county and municipal levels of government. Each county has three commissioners who are elected based on the population of each district. The commissioners serve a six-year term of office. Among the current commissioners in Sanders County, The District One Commissioner (central portions of the county) is a Democrat and the District Two Commissioner (eastern portion of the county) is a Republican as is the District Three Commissioner (western portion of the county). In Lincoln County, the Libby District Commissioner is a Republican, the Eureka District Commissioner is a Republican and the Troy District Commissioner is a Democrat.

Other elected positions in these counties include the following: the Clerk of the Court; Clerk and Recorder; the County Attorney; Treasurer; Sheriff; Coroner; and the Superintendent of Schools. Lincoln County also has an Executive Assistant to the County Commissioners to assist with the details of day-to-day county business; and, Sanders County has an Administrator that performs similar functions.

As elected officials, commissioners are “high profile” and need to be accessible to their constituents. Indeed, commissioners in each county noted that the demand for accessibility often results in long hours and contacts with constituents at odd times of the day. And they suggest that their constituents perceive this type of accessibility as essential. The effect of these demands is that commissioners are actively involved in a wide range of meetings and interactions with public groups. Furthermore, the constraints of county funding often means they perform a wider range of tasks because there is limited funding for staff support. They are busy people.

Commissioners govern based on their authority as officials elected by their constituents. Commissioners in both Lincoln and Sanders counties describe voters as “politically conservative” regardless of their party affiliation. Similarly, none of the commissioners appear to believe that party affiliation is the essential characteristic that motivates voters to elect them to office. The personal identity of candidates and their stance on key local and philosophical issues is believed to be more important than party affiliation for electing candidates to office. Indeed, commissioners describe their constituents as especially concerned about issues concerning personal freedom, property rights, taxation, and the role of government in their personal lives. In both counties, constituents do not favor zoning. In fact, in Sanders County a group named Montanans for Property Rights is especially active in

limiting planning and zoning actions by county government. These constituents took actions to eliminate the County Planning Board, an action also supported by the Montana Militia. This took place through an initiative placed on the ballot that was approved by the voters.

Such actions as opposing the Planning Board represent a more general orientation to favoring limited government among some constituents in these counties. These constituents place a high value on personal freedom and property rights; and, some suggest the numbers of these constituents are growing because those with this philosophical orientation are attracted to the political climate of Sanders and Lincoln counties. Indeed, in each county groups have formed to express their concerns about limiting the role of government in the personal lives of county citizens. In Sanders County, the Militia as well as Montanans for Property Rights expresses this orientation. In Lincoln County a group known as "Project 56" is active in expressing their concerns about the role of government in public life. However, Project 56 also has a specific concern with the relationship of community life to natural resources as expressed in a portion of their Mission Statement which describes the purpose of the group as promoting: " ... the moral, physical and economic well-being of Lincoln County and the people living here by utilizing our natural resources through the empowerment of the Lincoln County Government." Their emphasis is on individual and property rights with special concerns about access to public lands and the use of natural resources to sustain community ways of life. Project 56 has made specific efforts to run candidates for local office in Lincoln County, including the School Board and City Council. Some of the commissioners on both counties suggested that governing in general is made more difficult because of the overall opposition to policies or actions that may involve regulation or enforcement of state or federal mandates that require counties to take particular actions. This component of the political constituents of both counties is noteworthy because it may influence planning and other actions that interact with county-KNF relationships.

Political constituents also occasionally bring to the attention of their commissioners alternative approaches to resource management based on what has been termed county supremacy or approaches rooted in the "Sage Brush Rebellion." As one commissioner noted:

> We had someone from out of the area come in and talk about county empowerment where the County Commissioners would have a role that would put them above the Forest Service and they (the commissioners) would be telling them what to do. That was very attractive to a lot of people. Lots of other people saw the fallacy of it. We are a conservative county and we have a certain element of people that are extremely independent and they don't want us telling them what to do any more than they want the Forest Service telling them what to do. You just have to work around that.

The conservative ideology and approaches of some constituents thus represent a governance challenge for commissioners in both counties. And, although other constituents may empathize with ideas such as county supremacy, they are not willing to take the next step to encourage adoption of that particular approach to forest management.

Another legitimate question about political constituents is the participation of voters in electing their commissioners. That is, does limited voter turnout affect the political base of commissioners? A brief overview of voter turnout in both counties can address that question. Political constituents in the two counties show similar characteristics in the

patterns of voting. Information for 1998, 2000, and 2002 elections indicates that voter turnout in the two counties is about the same as the Montana average. Table 2: Voter Registration & Turnout 1998-2002 shows that for the 2002 elections, Montana had an average of 54.5 percent voter turnout whereas Lincoln County had 56.9 percent and Sanders County 57.3 percent. The average voter turn out for all Americans for the 2002 elections was 54.7 percent. However, data compiled by the Federal Elections Commission suggests that in 1996 Montanans ranked third in the nation (62.06%) in the ratio of voter turn out to registered voters (FEC, 1996). For all states, turnout tends to be higher in presidential election years. This probably accounts for the differences between 1998 and 2000 in Table 2. Although the overall state average decreased more than 5 percent between 2000 and 2002, the turnout for both Lincoln and Sanders counties did not show as large a decline. This is probably accounted for by local issues that were important for residents in the 2002 county elections. Yet, the overall degree of voter participation suggests that residents of these two counties turn out in numbers comparable to the rest of Montana.

Table 2: Voter Registration & Turnout 1998-2002

		Primary			General		
Location	Year	Registered	Votes Cast	%	Registered	Votes Cast	%
Montana	1998	602,716	161,568	26.8%	639,241	338,733	53.0%
	2000	671,325	223,419	33.3%	698,260	417,916	59.9%
	2002	606,147	174,730	28.8%	624,548	340,272	54.5%
Lincoln County	1998	12,541	4,622	36.9%	11,871	6,961	58.6%
	2000	13,274	4,030	30.4%	13,776	7,999	58.1%
	2002	11,914	3,149	26.4%	12,286	6,987	56.9%
Sanders County	1998	7,458	2,324	31.2%	7,612	4,181	54.9%
	2000	8,009	2,355	29.4%	8,339	4,800	57.6%
	2002	7,085	2,348	33.1%	7,294	4,180	57.3%

Montana State Source: http://sos.state.mt.us/css/ELB/Voter_Turnout.asp
Lincoln County Source: Lincoln Clerk and County Recorders Election Department
Sanders County Source: Sanders Clerk and County Recorders Election Department

2.2 County Revenues and Federal Funding: PILT and Payments to States

Montana counties receive a variety of federal funds that are important revenue sources, including both Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT) and what we will term "Payments to States" monies. PILT funds derive from a 1976 law (Public Law 94-565) that provide funds to local governments based on the number of acres of federal lands within their jurisdiction. These payments are affected by federal funding limitations, prior year "Payments to States", and formulas based on county populations. Based on annual congressional appropriation decisions, PILT payments may not always be fully funded. Counties may also receive monies based on a 1908 law [2] that allocated ten percent of the gross revenues generated from timber harvest, grazing, mining, and all other uses from the federal lands within their jurisdictions. The Weeks Law of 1911 increased the amount from ten to twenty-five percent. These

2 Usually termed the "Forest Receipts Program" the provisions were specified in the Agricultural Reapportionment Act of 1908. The Chief of the Forest Service at the time stated, "It pays those counties in which the Forests are located 10 percent of all the receipts from the sale of timber, use of the range, and various other uses, and it does this every year. It is a sure and steady income, because the resources of the National Forests are used in such a way that they keep coming without a break."

"twenty-five percent monies" are mandated to be used for schools and roads. With recent diminishing commercial uses of federal lands, in 2000 the President signed the Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act (PL 106-393). The purpose of this Act is to directly address diminishing amounts of the twenty-five percent monies. This new law allows counties the option of continuing to receive the twenty-five percent amount or to elect to receive a fixed amount based on the average of the three highest years between 1986 and 1999. Payments to States and PILT funding for the counties is briefly summarized in the following sections.

2.2.1 PAYMENTS TO STATES: PL 106-393

Payments to States monies are also substantial sources of revenues for both Lincoln and Sanders counties. Table 3: Payments to States for Montana 1986 - 1999 shows the payments to all Montana counties and the average for the 1986-1999 time period. The table is sorted high to low for the average amount, showing that Lincoln County ranks 1st and Sanders County 2nd among the 56 counties for the 1986-1999 time period. Table 4: Payments to States FY2001-2003 shows the top ten Montana counties for recent Payments to States funding. Again, Lincoln and Sanders counties rank first and second with a total of $5,108,387 and $1,447,394 respectively. Table 4: Payments to States FY2001-2003 shows the totals and Title I, II, and III allocations for the time period since the law was enacted.

Commissioners acknowledge that these funds provide a substantial contribution to the revenues for both counties. For example, one noted:

> If we had to replace that money (Payments to States) it would take around a 100 mils to make up the difference. It's a huge boon to the local tax payers.

The commissioners also suggest that while the "secure funding" provided by PL 106-393 is important:

> It would be so much better if we could have healthy forests and healthy communities. The secure funding is not a cure all. It has been a good thing to know that we had it, but our ultimate goal is to get the jobs back, to get our forests cleaned up. … It has always been very clear that we realized what we were loosing with the declining revenues that were coming off the forest. And we needed to do something to protect that with a long term goal of we would really like to get back into the woods. It is easier said than done.
>
> We recognize that we will never be back to the level we were and maybe we shouldn't be. But, we also recognize we are a county that is 78 percent forest. In order to have healthy communities and healthy forests, those forests have to be used. I believe we can and we will reach a level of management, if we can struggle to hold on to what we have for infrastructure.

These sentiments suggest that while Payments to States monies are an important short-term benefit to county fiscal health, timber harvesting that supports local businesses and lifestyles will guarantee long-term fiscal health for counties.

Table 3: Payments to States for Montana 1986 - 1999

County	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Aver.
Lincoln	2,806.7	2,138.8	2,636.3	2,926.5	4,932.6	4,518.2	5,413.4	6,721.4	6,128.0	4,521.4	4,009.9	3,388.4	3,651.0	2,319.2	4,008.0
Sanders	601.9	749.7	969.1	851.8	1,378.9	1,054.0	1,594.0	1,452.1	1,867.8	1,290.1	1,175.5	945.8	1,251.1	960.3	1,153.0
Flathead	1,124.9	1,049.6	1,907.0	1,148.6	1,038.1	966.8	1,352.2	1,624.3	839.6	983.2	795.4	635.7	909.4	505.7	1,062.9
Mineral	227.3	223.7	218.7	269.1	679.2	334.0	537.0	868.3	1,287.1	452.5	430.3	615.4	666.6	294.7	507.4
Missoula	287.5	279.1	358.4	322.2	630.8	349.8	545.3	831.5	1,084.4	445.1	411.5	545.0	612.5	279.0	498.7
Powell	239.7	251.8	362.3	268.9	377.8	243.9	375.5	436.5	460.6	335.1	270.3	317.9	393.5	185.9	322.8
Lewis&Clark	149.7	233.7	165.6	165.4	326.4	216.0	351.2	266.0	416.6	405.7	330.4	380.1	565.7	216.2	299.2
Granite	134.4	133.7	191.0	239.0	390.0	168.8	293.3	370.9	608.7	345.7	269.4	318.7	420.2	179.6	290.2
Ravalli	468.9	458.7	386.0	429.4	276.8	223.1	158.5	212.9	86.3	218.5	166.6	212.1	183.5	98.4	255.7
Beaverhead	147.6	146.5	140.5	66.8	149.4	129.8	123.2	86.9	200.3	135.1	237.3	132.7	116.6	223.6	145.5
Jefferson	63.4	77.1	109.5	136.7	173.5	69.4	129.4	75.6	170.8	203.5	133.7	141.7	215.2	90.1	127.8
Park	66.5	97.0	102.5	108.2	90.1	97.8	82.9	114.5	181.2	101.2	122.9	134.9	68.2	69.4	102.7
Madison	85.7	89.8	98.2	71.2	107.9	81.8	86.3	68.5	144.9	107.5	144.6	97.2	95.3	122.9	100.1
Meagher	34.0	67.2	41.9	46.7	61.0	63.3	106.4	86.5	140.7	146.6	133.1	92.7	236.3	68.7	94.6
Lake	93.8	89.1	166.3	96.1	79.4	75.0	107.2	127.7	56.9	76.4	60.7	47.9	71.7	39.4	84.8
Gallatin	50.7	74.9	79.3	83.2	68.8	74.4	61.7	86.0	136.1	74.1	92.9	103.3	50.7	49.3	77.5
Broadwater	30.2	54.4	25.3	28.7	77.1	43.0	70.2	21.7	52.0	85.9	60.6	95.3	105.7	47.8	57.0
Judith Basin	16.9	35.1	24.6	27.3	24.8	36.4	63.1	57.6	89.7	86.6	82.7	42.4	150.2	38.2	55.4
Silver Bow	24.0	24.1	44.0	52.3	58.9	22.8	41.6	29.1	65.2	69.4	48.9	41.5	69.5	33.2	44.6
Teton	13.3	27.8	19.4	21.6	19.6	28.8	49.8	45.5	70.9	68.4	65.3	33.5	118.6	30.2	43.8
Powder River	26.8	27.3	27.6	35.1	31.4	31.1	41.8	36.1	43.1	56.2	37.6	29.1	26.3	66.5	36.9
Carbon	25.8	27.8	28.4	34.9	30.8	31.0	39.2	35.9	44.9	51.9	37.4	30.9	25.2	58.7	35.9
Sweet Grass	23.4	31.8	33.2	36.3	30.6	32.5	31.1	38.0	56.0	38.5	39.9	40.8	24.2	32.2	34.9
Cascade	10.1	21.1	14.8	16.4	14.9	21.9	37.9	34.6	53.9	52.0	49.7	25.4	90.2	22.9	33.3
Deer Lodge	20.9	20.9	30.0	29.3	37.6	19.1	27.7	19.4	43.8	41.7	38.4	28.2	44.1	31.4	30.9
Stillwater	14.7	15.0	15.1	19.2	17.2	17.1	23.0	19.8	23.6	30.8	20.6	15.9	14.4	36.4	20.2
Pondera	6.0	12.6	8.8	9.8	8.9	13.1	22.6	20.7	32.2	31.1	29.6	15.2	53.8	13.7	19.9
Fergus	5.4	11.2	7.8	8.7	7.9	11.6	20.1	18.4	28.6	27.7	26.4	13.5	47.9	12.2	17.7
Wheatland	2.9	6.1	5.2	5.8	5.2	7.7	13.4	12.6	19.6	18.9	18.1	9.2	32.8	8.3	11.8
Rosebud	7.6	7.7	7.8	9.9	8.9	8.8	11.8	10.2	12.2	15.8	10.6	8.2	7.4	18.7	10.4
Carter	7.0	7.2	7.3	9.2	8.3	8.2	11.0	9.5	11.3	14.8	9.9	7.6	6.9	17.5	9.7

ARC

County	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Aver.
Chouteau	1.7	3.6	2.5	2.8	2.6	3.8	6.5	6.0	9.3	8.9	8.5	4.4	15.5	3.9	5.7
Glacier	1.6	3.4	2.4	2.6	2.4	3.5	6.1	5.6	8.7	8.4	8.0	4.1	14.5	3.7	5.3
Golden Valley	1.3	2.8	2.0	2.2	2.0	2.9	5.0	4.6	7.1	6.9	6.6	3.4	12.0	3.0	4.4
Total	6,822.6	6,500.2	8,238.5	7,581.9	11,149.7	9,009.5	11,839.5	13,854.9	14,482.3	10,555.7	9,383.2	8,558.1	10,366.7	6,180.9	9,608.8

Source: USDA Forest Service http://www.fs.fed.us/payments/payments_table.pdf
Amounts in $1000's

ARC

Table 4: Payments to States FY2001-2003

County	Title I	Title III	Interest	Total
Lincoln	$4,848,391	$248,124	$11,872	$5,108,387
Sanders	$1,394,777	$49,227	$3,390	$1,447,394
Flathead	$1,285,764		$3,074	$1,288,838
Missoula	$603,304	$106,465	$1,563	$711,332
Mineral	$577,670	$108,319	$1,549	$687,568
Powell	$390,485	$68,909	$1,011	$460,405
Lewis & Clark	$361,930	$63,870	$937	$426,737
Granite	$330,429	$82,607	$909	$413,945
Ravalli	$309,333		$681	$310,014
Beaverhead	$165,582	$41,396	$456	$207,433

Source: 2002-2003 Montana Association of Counties website http://maco.cog.mt.us/newsletters/February2003.htm
Source 2001-2002 USFS website http://www.fs.fed.us/payments/Title_I_II_III_summary_by_county.pdf
Source 2000-2001 2000-2001 USFS website http://www.fs.fed.us/r1/forest_range/payment_to_states/Distribution_MT.htm

2.2.2 PILT

PILT payments are also an important source of local government revenues throughout the western United States. These funds may be used for essentially any governmental purpose. Table 5 titled PILT for Thirteen Western States 1995-1999 shows these payments. As this table shows, Montana ranked 5th or higher among the 13 western states in PILT payments for each of the years from 1995 to 1999.

Table 5: PILT for Thirteen Western States 1995-1999

State	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Alaska	$4,713,149	$4,881,171	$6,780,912	$8,067,394	$8,734,619
Arizona	$8,435,276	$9,637,593	$9,439,156	$10,033,602	$10,275,296
California	$9,620,931	$10,981,158	$11,144,562	$12,001,299	$12,783,359
Colorado	$6,621,107	$7,817,409	$8,083,786	$8,464,227	$9,294,770
Hawaii	$0	$0	$9,865	$13,987	$14,500
Idaho	$7,055,419	$7,995,619	$7,719,459	$8,024,068	$8,354,480
Montana	$7,728,062	$8,932,523	$8,932,282	$9,345,804	$9,846,022
Nevada	$6,462,215	$7,061,291	$6,863,738	$6,973,002	$7,180,805
New Mexico	$10,526,826	$11,799,581	$11,152,959	$11,375,334	$11,597,426
Oregon	$2,750,818	$3,469,868	$3,497,163	$3,778,244	$3,720,267
Utah	$8,682,991	$9,587,416	$9,308,104	$9,477,033	$9,783,359
Washington	$4,790,444	$2,210,219	$2,812,553	$3,253,931	$3,707,574
Wyoming	$5,740,222	$7,220,748	$7,465,499	$7,658,654	$7,969,204

Source: University of Nevada, Reno, Cooperative Extension Fact Sheet 2-03

Table 6: 2002 County PILT Payments Ranked by Amount shows that Lincoln County ranked 20th among the fifty-six Montana counties in PILT payments and Sanders County ranked 32nd for the 2002 year.

Table 6: 2002 County PILT Payments Ranked by Amount

Montana Totals	$16,163,888.00	27,095,167			
County	Payment	Total Acres	County	Payment	Total Acres
Flathead County	$1,441,781.00	2,440,181	Lake County	$175,103.00	155,444
Ravalli County	$1,282,827.00	1,109,623	McCone County	$154,437.00	273,745
Lewis & Clark County	$1,187,404.00	1,070,978	Judith Basin County	$152,810.00	308,427
Gallatin County	$815,683.00	703,199	Sanders County	$147,452.00	914,740
Missoula County	$740,216.00	711,563	Powder River Cnty	$131,131.00	594,815
Park County	$723,202.00	945,492	Granite County	$125,143.00	703,947
Fergus County	$557,567.00	486,084	Pondera County	$116,819.00	107,919
Carbon County	$541,960.00	572,524	Meagher County	$107,187.00	483,883
Beaverhead County	$502,724.00	2,047,829	Garfield County	$101,396.00	814,977
Jefferson County	$501,736.00	555,697	Carter County	$99,002.00	594,642
Valley County	$480,083.00	1,122,308	Yellowstone County	$89,540.00	77,952
GlacierCounty	$473,847.00	401,496	Musselshell County	$82,895.00	87,517
Madison County	$457,383.00	1,052,173	Fallon County	$80,287.00	115,901
Powell County	$427,143.00	720,108	Dawson County	$75,341.00	63,960
Custer County	$389,742.00	334,095	Wheatland County	$71,330.00	65,924
Rosebud County	$384,326.00	329,949	Prairie County	$69,150.00	411,364
Blaine County	$358,310.00	453,106	Richland County	$62,076.00	54,194
Broadwater County	$325,315.00	282,537	Hill County	$56,430.00	47,790
TetonCounty	$312,686.00	284,568	Toole County	$53,313.00	45,579
Lincoln County	$281,797.00	1,748,177	Big Horn County	$48,148.00	41,434
Sweet Grass County	$275,850.00	303,397	Liberty County	$39,490.00	33,656
Silver Bow Census Ct	$256,609.00	233,632	Petroleum County	$39,084.00	335,040
Phillips County	$244,702.00	1,382,944	Golden Valley Cnty	$34,930.00	31,537
Cascade County	$236,641.00	215,467	Wibaux County	$30,973.00	26,995
Anaconda Deer Ldge	$221,332.00	197,219	Roosevelt County	$4,820.00	4,284
Stillwater County	$220,596.00	191,880	Sheridan County	$2,106.00	1,781
Mineral County	$189,797.00	642,654	Treasure County	$877.00	748
Chouteau County	$181,126.00	157,892	Daniels County	$233.00	200

Source: BLM http://www.blm.gov/pilt/pymt_result.php?searchtype=MT&searchterm=FY_2002

Table 7: PILT and Acreage 1999-2003 indicate the specific payments to Lincoln and Sanders counties in the 1999-2003 years.

Table 7: PILT and Acreage 1999-2003

	Montana		Lincoln County		Sanders County	
Year	Payment	Total Acres	Payment	Total Acres	Payment	Total Acres
1999	$9,846,022	27,169,848	$174,546	1,773,891	$91,227	914,507
2000	$10,109,778	27,126,242	$184,332	1,747,833	$96,473	914,755
2001	$15,713,745	27,121,607	$267,350	1,748,177	$139,894	914,755
2002	$16,163,888	27,095,167	$281,797	1,748,177	$147,452	914,740
2003	$16,874,448	27,103,714	$317,881	1,748,177	$166,332	914,740

Source: 1999 – 2002 BLM website http://www.blm.gov/pilt/
Source: 2003 Montana Association of Counties website http://maco.cog.mt.us/pages/PILT2002&2003.htm

For both Lincoln and Sanders counties, PILT payments represent a steadily increasing source of revenue that is important for counties with a limited property tax base.

2.3 Communication, Collaboration, Cooperation with the USFS

Communication and collaboration with county governments exists within the context of the fiscal interests of counties and the political interests of the constituents who elect County Commissioners and other officials. These context factors affect working relationships between the commissioners and the KNF. With these other factors in mind, this section addresses several questions about the relationship of county government with the staff of the Kootenai National Forest:

- What is the character and quality of the relationships between the counties and the KNF?
- What are the expectations and desires of County Commissioners for communication with the KNF?
- How will county expectations and desires for communication and working relationships with the KNF affect Forest Plan revision?

2.3.1 CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH COUNTIES

What is the character and quality of the relationships between the counties and the KNF? In general, the County Commissioners for both Lincoln and Sanders counties describe a cooperative and satisfactory relationship with the KNF. For example, a Sanders County Commissioner commented:

> I look at the Forest Service as being in partnership with the county. We have been very lucky in Sanders County to have such a good relationship with both our Forests. We have gotten along just really well with the Forest Service. They have helped us with things and we have helped them. That is not always true that counties get along with their Forests. The Forests have offered open door policies to us and us to them. We have regular meetings with them … it has just been a really good relationship. The people that

> work for the Forest Service are really visible … they are participating and giving back to their community….

Lincoln County Commissioners also suggest there is a cooperative working relationship between the county and the KNF that is built on trust:

> The way we interact with the Forest Service has changed dramatically since we took office. We requested they give us an update on the Forest and how it affected the county so we would have a foundation of understanding of what their role was and how they interact with us. That has been very beneficial.
>
> In the beginning they were very, I think, uncomfortable. We would meet for lunch and that was not the best way. When they changed Forest Supervisors, we asked that they come to our normal meeting. And they have been very good to do that and very open. That has been a tremendous help, it has helped to build trust because what they say in private and what they say in public are the same. It has not only built trust, but it has also built a respect for the position that we fill and the value of our input. We value what they tell us and they value what we have to share with them, because we are the elected officials that represent the people. They are hired employees and we are elected and they have a great level of respect for that.

Commissioners characterize their working relationship with the KNF, and especially the Forest Supervisor, as "constructive" and "cooperative." This is acknowledged as a change from what was described as a previously adversarial relationship. In part, this is attributed to a greater integration of KNF personnel into community activities and events. For example, one commissioner commented that in the past USFS personnel were perceived as stand-offish and as not socializing extensively with other community members. This is a description that fits with one of the dominant themes in the 1995 KNF Social Assessment. However, this perception has changed.

> We see a real difference today where the Forest Service people integrate into the community at every level and they make a real effort to be good community citizens. And I don't think that was there before. I think it has been a change. In my area the soccer wouldn't go without them, the Little League would not run without them, they are active in the Rotary, the churches, and the Chamber of Commerce. It was one of the things that was pointed out to the Ecology Center when they started to run down the Forest Service. We told them to stop right there, we are not going to allow you to run down the citizens of our community. The people that work for the Forest Service are the same people that are a part of our community.

Agency personnel and leadership are perceived to be part of the community. The support of them as community members when they were "run down" by an outside group illustrates a change in local assessments of the integration of USFS personnel into local communities.

The agency is also perceived as offering information and resources to assist counties. For example, when PL 106-393 was first enacted, the Lincoln County Commissioners suggest

that the Forest Supervisor and other agency staff provided help interpreting and implementing the details and provisions of the law. Two Commissioners suggested:

> That did not happen in every community like it happened here. We know it did not. We heard other communities (from other counties) say that it was such a struggle and that their Forest Service did not help out. They have helped us by pointing us to the right people in Washington and they put on conferences so we could learn together.

This appears to exemplify an effort by KNF line officers and staff to support local government with resources; and, an effort to anticipate needs and potential problem areas that might otherwise strain county-KNF relationships.

In summary, the information that emerged in conversations with all six commissioners in Lincoln and Sanders counties suggests there is a relatively cooperative and high quality relationship based on strong communication and mutual trust and respect. This is a dramatic change from findings in the 1995 Social Assessment. Other research (Rodriquez, 1995) also addresses the variable nature of USFS-county relationships; and, some of the social and economic characteristics that appear to influence these relationships. Counties that have more confrontational and less desirable working relationships with land management agencies have characteristics such as: higher dependence on federal funds related to natural resource industries; small total population; large land area with higher percentages of public lands; weak retail sectors; and higher employment in natural resource industries (Rodriquez, 1995). Using the criteria identified in the Rodriquez work, both Lincoln and Sanders counties might be characterized as having characteristics that would predict a more confrontational and less desirable working relationship between local government and the USFS. However, this is clearly not the case for the KNF. Factors related to the communications and styles of interaction between the KNF and county government appear to account for some of the reasons for the high quality of existing relationships.

2.3.2 COUNTY EXPECTATIONS AND DESIRES FOR COMMUNICATION

What are the expectations and desires of County Commissioners for communication with the KNF? Addressing this question requires consideration of patterns of communication between elected officials and the KNF. These patterns include the interactions between the County Commissioners and the Forest Supervisor, the Public Information Officer, and the District Rangers. Rangers are especially important in those areas more distant from the Supervisor's Office. However, even in Libby and Troy, District Rangers are important channels for communication with a wide range of publics including County Commissioners.

To address this question, discussions were conducted with the six commissioners in Lincoln and Sanders County. In both counties, two of the three commissioners participated in a joint discussion and the third was interviewed at a later date. While the information elicited in these discussions suggests similar expectations, there are also some differences that indicate the social conditions in each county. In general, the commissioners expressed positive assessments of the relationship and patterns of communication with the KNF. This leaves a limited amount to present in terms of desired changes. However, in addition to discussing some selected areas for improved communication, this discussion reviews the factors that seem to be contributing to a constructive working relationship between the Commissioners and the KNF. We have aggregated the information for both counties since many of the issues are similar.

Commissioners indicate that prior to the present Forest Supervisor, communication with KNF staff was infrequent and irregular. However, the commissioners generally praise the present leadership team, especially KNF staff attendance at County Commissioner meetings. Although there was some suggestion that KNF leaders are not attending these meetings as frequently as in the past, commissioners are overall satisfied with the communication and coordination with the KNF. Indeed, Lincoln County Commissioners indicate they value the quality of existing working relationships with KNF leaders and contrast this with their knowledge of similar relationships in other counties. The noteworthy themes in the discussions with the Lincoln County Commissioners suggest characteristics identified below are contributing to existing satisfaction with the county-KNF relationship. These characteristics also apply to Sanders County, although there are some differences as noted later in this discussion.

The relationship is based on mutual respect. Commissioners emphasize that they perceive that KNF leaders understand and acknowledge their status as elected officials. Elected officials represent their constituents on issues of interest to the county; and, their elected status represents a "voice of the people" that commissioners perceive as acknowledged by KNF leaders. Similarly, the commissioners acknowledge the expertise and professionalism of KNF personnel in managing the Forest. This assessment of "mutual respect" in the relationship and acknowledgement of the status of commissioners as elected officials is an essential building block in the current success of the KNF-county relationships.

Forest management is a topic of mutual interest between the counties and the KNF. Commissioners suggest there are mutual interests with the KNF regarding forest management issues. For example, a Lincoln County Commissioner suggested:

> We are a natural resource dependent county and we need our relationship with the Forest Service, the interaction about grazing, recreation, timber or whatever. Maybe there has been a realization in building this relationship that we need each other: they need us and we need them and we are in this together.

The commissioners recognize how that KNF management influences, in their words, "the social, economic, and cultural" environment of both counties. This recognition of mutual interests should not be taken for granted. For example, a Lincoln County Commissioner contrasted KNF management and communication styles with other federal and state agencies:

> The other agencies in the county are not very receptive to working with us. They just try to ram things down our throats. The other agencies do not meet with us regularly; they only meet with us when they have to.

The points of contrast are noteworthy: Commissioners perceive that other agencies do not recognize the interests of the county, they pursue their plans and interests with limited consultation, and they attempt to "ram down" their throats actions that may have important consequences for county residents.

Trust is fundamental to an effective working relationship between the county and the KNF. The 1995 Social Assessment suggested that trust in KNF management was an issue of concern among most stakeholders. The assessment of trust in KNF managers, especially as expressed by County Commissioners, has changed. Commissioners indicate that trust is a

fundamental component of their relationship with the KNF. Part of this trust is built on effective and specific styles of communication. For example, the commissioners suggested that formal meetings were preferable to informal gatherings because there was less potential for confusion about communication. A commissioner quoted earlier commented:

> What they say in private and what they say in public are now the same.

However, more fundamentally, this trust is built on a history of positive working relationships that is evaluated as mutually beneficial. For example,

> All the people here, the Forest Service and us, have worked very hard to sit down at the table and see what we can do.

The outcome of that hard work is an evaluation by the commissioners of the good faith of the KNF leadership team.

Accessibility and responsiveness contribute to effective communication. Commissioners suggest that KNF managers are accessible. For example,

> We feel comfortable picking up the phone and saying 'you need to have a public meeting.' And I go to Rotary with two of them from the Forest Service and we often talk after Rotary. The process we have probably is not standard. It is above standard. I think it is a two way street, it is building a relationship and making it a team effort.

And another statement expresses the same sentiment:

> They meet with us regularly. We see them individually; and, we are in touch with our District Rangers. We can walk into their offices anytime and be treated respectfully and that has a lot to do with it.

Similarly, another Commissioner commented:

> When the fires started in 2000, both the District and the SO offices were on top of it and they kept us informed. I was invited to come to the command meetings and when we were too busy they came here! They took us out on the fire and lots of Rangers wouldn't do that… We appreciated that.

These statements do not suggest any barriers to communicating with or getting access to KNF line officers and staff. They also suggest a willingness to be responsive to community and commissioner needs for information in fire situations, even though agency staff is exceptionally busy at these times. Additionally, several District Rangers were praised for their anticipation of potential impacts to communities from upcoming management actions or other initiatives, suggesting that KNF staff is perceived as responsive to community needs in performing their usual duties.

KNF leadership and USFS personnel are perceived as both community minded and "part of the community." This assessment represents one of the most dramatic changes from the

1995 KNF Social Assessment. It was our assessment in 1995 that community members evaluated KNF staff as not involved in their communities and "cliquish." In fact information from discussions for this update indicates this was once a common community perception. For example, one discussant commented:

> When we were kids growing up here the Rangers and Forest Service people were always kind of looked at as sticking to themselves and just their own little clique. We don't look at them that way now.

Information collected for this update suggests a substantially different assessment of KNF staff as part of the community:

> If we lost the SO (Supervisor's Office) out of this county it would have a huge economic impact, not to mention socially and culturally. …. We appreciate their presence here. They bring fresh ideas here and they are willing to participate and be leaders. The children of the employees are very involved in our schools. They belong to our clubs and our Cultural Arts Center. Our District Rangers are very involved in our community….

The integration of KNF personnel into the community was also expressed in an earlier quote from a commissioner who described a recent interaction with groups from outside the community. Members of this outside group criticized KNF staff in their discussions with the commissioners, but the commissioners suggested that such statements were inappropriate because the persons being criticized were fellow community members. Their response suggests that agency personnel are indeed considered part of the community that should be supported and defended when criticized. This integration into the community is an important basis for the relationship with the County Commissioners because it suggests that the well-being of the community will also be part of the considerations by KNF managers who are fellow community members.

The Resource Advisory Committee (RAC) is an asset in the County-KNF relationship. Commissioners in Lincoln County commented directly on the value of the RAC as an arena in which forest management issues can be productively discussed. For example:

> Another thing that has helped has been the RAC. We are only in our second year and at first we were very fearful. We were very fortunate we were able to …get environmentalists that wanted to sit down and come to common decisions. Everybody we have on our RAC, well, we kid each other about our points of view knowing that we are opposed. But, we sit down at the table and work through things. Last year we had, I think, 19 projects and there were unanimous decisions on each one.
>
> The Forest Service has been there at every meeting. They have been guiding us, but not telling us. They sit back and let the group interact. They have been really good. The RAC has been a catalyst. The environmentalists have come in to talk to us apart from the RAC. I don't know if that would have happened before the RAC. Now we can have respectful disagreements. It would not have worked five years ago… but it does now.

The RAC has proved to be an arena in which relationships between industry, community, environmental, and other stakeholder groups have developed. The RAC provides an opportunity for discussion of management issues, working to achieve consensus about project goals, and communication that might not otherwise exist. Importantly, KNF staff provides guidance and consultation that is positively evaluated by the commissioners. The perceived success of the RAC is partially attributed to the efforts of KNF leaders as well as participants in the RAC. Commissioners evaluate this success as contributing to a changed environment in which new solutions may emerge to prior conflicts about resource management.

Communication needs improvement in selected areas. In general, the regular meetings with the commissioners combined with outreach efforts to inform the commissioners of upcoming management actions are evaluated as sufficient for the current needs of both counties. However, one Lincoln County commissioner did comment about other patterns of communication between the KNF and Lincoln County communities they feel need to be changed. The specific examples cited include Open Houses, the structure of public meetings, and the willingness of publics to comment on management actions. Echoing ideas expressed by other discussants that participated in this update, the commissioners were not satisfied with Open Houses as a forum for communication about forest management issues. One commissioner emphasized that these were generally perceived as a less than desirable forum for communication, but the KNF persists in holding Open Houses.

> We **hate**, the public hates, the Open House policy and the way they run meetings. We have been very vocal about it. They are reluctant to change it. I am assuming they don't change it because it is some directive from Washington that it is the way to conduct meetings. But what our constituents feel, and we do as well, is there should be another way. Maybe a combination of a structured meeting where they get up there and explain what they are doing and then let people go to stations around the room. Then we could come back to another structured venue to ask questions and then close it in a structured way. But, the Open House where you don't get to hear what my concerns are or your neighbor's concerns are, it leaves us all without an assessment of the problem.

A key issue is that attendees at Open Houses do not have the opportunity to hear either opposing or supporting points of view about a management issues or topics. There appears to be a strong need for this opportunity. That need is not met by the current structure of KNF Open House meetings. The suggestion for some combination of structured presentation, small group discussion, and then structured collective discussion further expresses a theme from other discussions about ensuring that different stakeholders can hear the points of view of others about a particular management topic.

A related issue concerns the process for publics to provide comment about management issues. There are some contrasting points of view about this topic. One perspective suggests that past public comment has not resulted in any outcomes that people evaluate as directly related to their input. The popular sentiment is something such as,

> They asked for our input and we gave it to them, but they did nothing about it.

The absence of any direct response to the comment is then used as an explanation for limited interest in meetings or other venues that address forest management issues.

There are positive characteristics about communication between the county and the KNF. There are some noteworthy characteristics about the KNF-Sanders County relationship that need highlighting. Sanders County Commissioners are generally satisfied with the relationship they have with the KNF. Although they do not have the same proximity to the Supervisor's Office as Lincoln County Commissioners, there is the perception that the Forest Supervisor and local Rangers are accessible. In their words,

> Things are working and there's no need for change.

There are several specific points to note that contribute to the expressed satisfaction with the relationship between Sanders County Commissioners.

- The commissioners have confidence and trust that KNF managers will inform them of issues that need attention. The commissioners noted that in the recent past KNF staff scheduled a meeting to discuss Forest Plan revision issues. This exemplifies the assessment that when there is a need for an exchange of information, KNF staff contacts the commissioners. However, it also suggests that the commissioners trust the judgment of KNF managers about when it is important to communicate. And, the commissioners also perceive that if they have a need to discuss issues, there is an open door at the District Ranger's office or the Forest Supervisor's office. This attribution of trust is an important contribution to current satisfaction with the KNF-Sanders County relationship.
- As with Lincoln County Commissioners, trust seems to be a foundation of the working relationship, but there is also a noteworthy definition of the roles and responsibilities of commissioners in relationship to the KNF. The attribution of trust and the nature of roles and responsibilities are each illustrated in the following quotation:

  > The Forest Service people are the professionals. They are also local people with local concerns and their concerns should not be that much different from ours. That is what bothers me about people like the Ecology Center trying to run things from outside when they do not know the local scene. And I think if we went in and tried to tell them (KNF) how to manage it, then we would be doing the same thing because they are professionals and we are not.

  The attribution of trust is in part based on the perception that KNF personnel are community members and, like other community members, they will not take actions to undermine the community. This is the kind of mutual trust that is often described as characterizing neighborly relationships in rural communities (Luloff and Krannich, 2002). The other element of this quotation suggests a perception of particular roles and responsibilities of the commissioners and the KNF. The Forest staff are the "professionals" who are trained to manage the ecosystem. The County Commissioners are elected officials with their own responsibilities. They realize the mutual interests of the county and the KNF, but they also appear to perceive a boundary that defines different roles and responsibilities: "… they are the professionals and we are not."

- Commissioners also have the expectation that because they have limited time and resources, it is the responsibility of the KNF to contact them when there are issues that need attention. As one commissioner noted,

> We have so many other things we have to do. As County Commissioners we don't want into this area (forest management) any more than we have to be. We have our senior citizens to care for and bills to pay and other problems to take care of day-to-day. Lots of time I have three or four meetings a day, everything from weeds to low cost housing and we have our road crews to deal with. We don't need to micro-manage the Forest. We would like to see … if they have specific issues they would like to talk about, I would like to meet with them and they can take our input. But I really think they have met that by coming to us periodically. They keep us pretty well informed.

Because commissioners have high demands on their time and a full agenda both in and out of their office, they rely on KNF managers to provide information as necessary. The attribution of trust in combination with the definition of the KNF as the responsible professionals suggests that there will be a need for ongoing outreach to the commissioners to maintain the strong working relationship that currently exists.

2.3.3 IMPLICATIONS FOR PLAN REVISION

What are the implications for LRMP revision of county expectations and desires for communication and working relationships with the KNF? As Forest Plan revision moves forward, the process for working with the County Commissioners should take into consideration the successes of the current relationship:

- Regular communication based on outreach by the KNF managers and staff.
- Inclusion of the commissioners into discussions about topics that are likely to have major consequences for their constituents.
- Awareness of and respect for the elected status and role of the commissioners as representatives of the citizens of their respective counties;
- Consideration for the high demands on commissioner's time in performing the everyday tasks of their position.
- Continue to build on and protect the trust between the commissioners and the KNF. This trust contributes to the overall positive evaluation of current patterns of communication and collaboration; and, it will be an important basis for any future relationships with KNF managers.

2.4 Summary of Key Points

The KNF and the two counties have mutual interests in the management of federal lands. Local governments receive important revenues from Payments to States funds as well as from Payments in Lieu of Taxes (PILT). These provide important fiscal benefits to citizens of the two counties. Cooperation and collaboration between the KNF and the counties has shown a significant change since the 1995 Social Assessment. Trust in leadership has improved along with overall assessments of the working relationship between KNF and the County Commissioners. The contributions of KNF personnel to leadership and civic involvement are recognized as an important asset for community well-being. The existing

working relationship with the counties is a basis for continued improvement in KNF relationships with both counties.