

Bighorn National Forest Plan Revision

Recap of Summer Field Trips

Nearly 100 people participated in the field trips held near Meadowlark Lake and Burgess Junction on July 21 and August 4. People had a chance to learn about Forest Plan revision and participate in a detailed discussion on six revision topics most frequently raised during initial scoping meetings last fall and winter:

- Water Quality
- Wildlife
- Forest Vegetation and Timber
- Wilderness
- Recreation and Travel Management
- Range and Grazing Management



“I want to give a special thank you to the people of our four county commissions, the six local conservation districts, and the Big Horn Mountain Country Coalition”, said Forest Supervisor Bill Bass. “Those folks sponsored the buses and the beverages, and helped us plan and coordinate this trip. Those things made a long day quite comfortable,” continued Bass.

One of the main benefits of the field trips was for people who use the Forest in different ways to learn from each other about the various multiple uses. A non-motorized trail user said “I was really impressed with the Wyoming Trail Riders [a motorized, ATV group], with their ethical and moral use of the trails.” People on the tour got to hear first hand from a grazing permittee about how summer pastures on the mountain fit into their year-long operation.

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Recap of Summer Field Trips (continued from page 1)

A Sierra Club member shared views on roadless and potential wilderness areas. “People who use the Bighorn National Forest realize there are many groups and individuals who share the mountain”, said Bass. “It is exciting to see people from various backgrounds realize they have a common goal for the management of the Bighorn NF, which is to be able to use the Forest today, while conserving the resources for future generations.”

An item of special interest was the lunch guest speakers, Clay Gibbons and Ken Kerns, who spoke on the history of people and uses of the Big Horn Mountain area. Both began their talks with the fact that one of the oldest human archeological sites in North America, the Colby site, is just a few miles south of Worland, indicating people have used the Big Horn Mountain area for almost as long as people have been in North America. One other interesting item Kerns shared was the process of the original establishment of the Bighorn Forest Reserve in 1897. Kerns related how Grover Cleveland, in the waning days of his administration and by executive proclamation, set aside 16 million acres of public domain land in the western states as Forest Reserves, much to the chagrin and dismay of most western citizens and elected officials. People saw the comparison to recent roadless process.



“Bald Mtn. City. (abandoned) Looking E.N.E. down Main Street. 7/20/1900” Professor J.G. Jack

The Bighorn National Forest has been used by people for thousands of years. Our challenge during the Forest Plan revision is to provide for the multiple uses that our generation currently enjoys in a sustainable manner so that future generations can enjoy those same uses.

Summary of Revision Issues

Many issues will be considered in some manner in the Revision decisions (standards and guidelines, goals/objectives, monitoring requirements, etc.), in the Revision effects analysis, and in project implementation. Some examples of issues include:

- Air, soil and water quality
- Special uses (permits such as outfitter/guides and summer homes)
- Cave management

Major issues will define the differences between the 1985 Forest Plan and the Revision; they will define the differences between alternatives. These issues were first listed in the November 1999 Notice of Intent, and have been slightly revised as we learned more about these topics. Several of the major issues, such as biological diversity, are very broad categories that include many resource areas. The five major topics are:

- Biological Diversity
- Timber Suitability and Management of Forested Lands
- Roadless/Wilderness
- Special Areas (Research Natural Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers)
- Recreation and Travel Management

The development of issues began during the Allowable Sale Quantity (ASQ) amendment process, when many people provided Bighorn NF staff with input. The majority of issues came from initial public revision meetings held in October 2000 to January 2001. Annual Forest Plan Monitoring Reports, laws and policies, and new resource inventories have also provided information that Forest Plan Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) members used to develop the issues.

There are two fairly lengthy documents that list issues, both of which are available on the Forest Plan Revision website (www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn):

Document	Contents
Forest Plan Revision Issue Disposition – 10/10/01	A complete list of issues and how they will be considered, or in some cases not considered, in Revision. This is a good table for people wishing to see how, and if, their scoping comments will be considered.
Summary of 1999 to 1995 Forest Plan Monitoring Reports	A list of the items taken from the past Forest Plan Monitoring Reports. The items in this list not mentioned by people at the scoping meetings were added the Revision Issue Disposition document.

A Disturbance in the Forest

One of the first species of tree a visitor is likely to encounter upon entering the Bighorn National Forest is ponderosa pine. This stately conifer is widely distributed throughout the west, and grows in nearly pure stands along the eastern flanks of the Big Horn Mountains.

An excellent opportunity to witness ponderosa pine forest dynamics lies a short distance from Dayton, Wyoming. Driving west on Highway 14, the climb up the mountain begins as the short and mid-grasses of the Great Plains fade in the rearview mirror and are quickly replaced by ponderosa pine forest.

Ponderosa forests share a common bond with other forest types in that they grow and change all the time. Fire, insects, and diseases are natural disturbances that change age, distribution, and density of forest communities. Historically, fire was the most significant factor to influence the Bighorn Mountains. Pine stands like those west of Dayton were kept open and park-like by the occurrence of frequent, low-intensity surface fires (and occasional crown fires) that ran up the mountain from the plains every few decades. Clad in a thick, scaly armor, the bark of mature ponderosa pines is ideally suited to withstand the recurrent ground fires that swept through the area and cleared the understory to create an open, widely scattered, pine forest.

With the advent of fire suppression around the turn of the century, the patchy ground fires that created openings and variety in the forest composition were snuffed out, and forests have become more densely stocked. As a result, insects, such as mountain pine beetle, play an increasingly active role in altering forest structure.

Mountain pine beetle is a widespread and important insect in various pine forests throughout the Rocky Mountains. Adult beetles attack trees in July and August, when they bore through the bark into the phloem region, or inner bark. The females build a network of pathways in the phloem, called galleries, where they lay their eggs. In addition to depositing eggs, the beetles carry a fungi that causes a blue-gray staining of the wood. The combined action of the beetle galleries and the bluestain fungi inhibits the flow of water in the tree. The eggs quickly hatch, and the larvae overwinter in the trees, mature and fly from their home tree the following summer to commence another cycle.

Trees that are under stress due to old age, drought, crowding, and diseases are most susceptible to an attack, but will often mount their own defense against an invasion; the presence of white or reddish-brown pitch tubes on the trunk indicate an attempt to drown beetles with resin as they bore into the inner bark. Despite these efforts, mountain pine beetles are often highly successful.

This picture shows mountain pine beetle at work in the ponderosa forest near Sand Turn. A number of these patches have become evident over the past few years. The trees in the center of this patch were killed several years ago, and are surrounded by red-needled trees that were killed in the last year or two. This is a typical spread pattern of the beetles.

A Disturbance in the Forest (continued from page 4)

Although an adult mountain pine beetle measures a scant 1/8 to 1/3 inch long, the impact they have on their environment is sometimes anything but small. Outbreaks have killed more than 1,000,000 acres of forest when they reach epidemic levels. This native insect has always been present in the Big Horns, but has only periodically reached population levels that kill large areas of forest.

Treatment of infestations is aimed at harvesting and burning, or chemically spraying, bug infested trees. Synthetic beetle attractants are also available to manipulate small outbreaks. Typically, management actions are not taken in remote or wild areas of national forests, as dead trees provide nesting sites for birds and small mammals, and the natural openings add habitat diversity with the increased grass, forb, and shrub growth.

During the current Forest Plan Revision process, evaluation of current and potential insect outbreaks and other ecological occurrences will be given in planning for the future management of the Forest. The Revision will set goals and objectives for areas of the Forest where beetle management will be appropriate or inappropriate. For example, in timber production emphasis areas, timber harvest would be appropriate to reduce the beetle risk by thinning stands to a lower density. On the other hand, beetle outbreaks may be allowed to run their course in areas allocated to biological and species diversity emphasis.

The mosaic of beetle-killed trees interspersed with live trees in the pine forests of the Bighorns is a reminder that forests change, with or without human interventions.



The Ponderosa pine forest in the Sand Turn area is becoming a "taste treat" for the beetles, as the forests are the proper age, size and density for their spread.

Recreation and Travel Management Work Groups

People interested in recreation and travel management on the Bighorn have met three times to provide input into revision on these topics. The objectives of these groups is to share and learn about the importance of different recreation uses and travel patterns, appreciate the complexity of planning for and balancing recreation use, and identify possible improvements to some of the recreation and travel management issues. Meetings are being held on the west and east side of the mountain, in order to make participation easier.

Anyone interested in attending these sessions are welcome. Please call Trish Clabaugh at 307-674-2683 to find out about future meetings.

The topic for the November meetings will be wildlife and road concerns related to big game hunting, closed roads, and road densities. Wyoming Game and Fish and Forest Service biologists will make presentations and participate in the discussions. The meeting in Sheridan will be on November 13 at the Forest Service office, 2013 East Side Second Street, from 6:30 to 8:30. The meeting in Greybull will be on November 14 at the Greybull Town Hall, 24 S. 5th, from 3 pm to 5 pm.



Jim Drake, a Bighorn National Forest employee, is shown patrolling during hunting season. (Photo courtesy of Sheridan Press)

Revision Timeline – Where Are We Now?

We began engaging people on revision about a year ago when we held public meetings in six communities around the Big Horn Mountains. We are planning on having the Final Revised Plan completed in about the summer of 2004. This update shows where we have been and where we are headed.

Date	Revision Step	Comments
10/2000 to 01/2001	Public Scoping meetings	Meetings were held in Worland, Sheridan, Buffalo, Lovell, Greybull and Gillette. People were asked to describe their best and worst futures for the Bighorn NF, issues, and what public involvement methods are the most effective.
2001	Existing Condition Assessments	The Forest Service Interdisciplinary Team (ID Team) is compiling reports on the existing condition of the Bighorn NF, at both the Forest-wide and water-shed scales. The first one, Clear Creek, Crazy Woman Creek and N. Fork Powder River,, should be on the website in November.
Summer 2001	Field Trips	Two field trips during July and August gave people a chance to discuss some of the Forest Plan Revision topics with their neighbors and Forest Service team members.
Early 2002	Alternative Development	The next major Revision step will take place in the first half of 2002.
Fall 2002	Effects Analysis	The ID team will analyze the environmental effects of the different management alternatives.
Summer 2003	Draft Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)	
Summer/Fall 2003	Public Comments on Draft Plan and Draft EIS	
Summer 2004	Final Revised Plan and EIS	

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We're on the web!
www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn

Thank You!

Over 100 people participated in the field trips held this summer, and over 300 shared their time with us during the initial round of meetings last winter. Currently, a group of people are meeting on a continuing basis to discuss how recreation and travel management might be addressed in the revised plan.

While we are committed to giving people a voice in how the Bighorn National Forest should be managed in the future under the revised Forest Plan, this won't work if the people that use and care about the Bighorn National Forest didn't share their thoughts and ideas with us. *Thank you* to those of you who have participated. We invite everyone with an interest in the future management of the Bighorn NF to join us at future meetings, or visit us at our office, or give us a call.

