

# BIGHORN NATIONAL FOREST



June 2004

Caring for the land and serving people since 1897

## Draft Forest Plan Revision - Announcement of Public Meetings

City	Location	Date	Time
Worland	County Fairgrounds Meeting Hall	July 15	6pm - 9pm
Gillette	Campbell County Library	July 20	5:30pm - 8:30pm
Sheridan	Best Western Sheridan Center	July 22	6pm - 9pm
Buffalo	Bozeman Trail Inn	August 2	6pm - 9pm
Greybull	Elks Lodge	Aug 3	6pm - 9pm
Lovell	Firehall	August 5	6pm - 9pm

For more information, see page 6

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### From the Forest Supervisor

Dear Friends of the Bighorn National Forest,

We have been working on revision of the 1985 Bighorn Forest Plan with individuals, groups, agencies and local governments from around the Big Horn mountains since 2000. We have held two rounds of formal public meetings, two public field trips, and met regularly, in open sessions, with local and state government representatives. We have met with individuals and interest groups. That input *has* made a difference in the draft documents. Plan direction has been revised, alternative maps have been re-drawn, and individual analyses have been amended as people have shared better information with us.

We are entering an important phase – the *official* public comment period for the *Draft* Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and *Draft* Forest Plan, which will be available to the public in early July. The official comment period is legally required, and official responses will only be compiled for comments received during this period. We will continue to accept input, thoughts, and ideas after the *official* comment period, although they may not be responded to in the Final EIS.

The comments, input, and information you share with us over the next few months will be some of the most important in formulating the final, selected Plan. Your input *will* make a difference in the final decision. Please consider the following as you review the Draft Plan and Draft EIS:

- The goals/objectives, standards/guidelines, management area allocations, and the monitoring plan are the decision items.
- The effects shown in the DEIS are our best estimates of what will happen if a particular alternative is implemented.

- Estimated outputs are **not** decisions, and while we tried to make them accurate, they may or may not occur over the next decade of plan implementation.
- Use the estimated effects to compare the alternatives and assess how they rank in relation to each other.
- Don't bog down over the precise accuracy of the estimates. Focus your attention and comments on the Plan decisions.

The preferred alternative, Alternative D, will serve as a template from which the best ideas from the other alternatives will be added to create the final Plan. Comments that identify aspects of other alternatives to be incorporated into Alternative D will be useful, as opposed to comments that 'vote' for one of the alternatives.

I personally extend my thanks to those who have participated in plan revision over the past 3.5 years. Your input has made a difference in the Draft Plan. We have been fortunate to have enjoyed respectful and thoughtful participation, which is not surprising to me knowing the people that live in the shadow of the Big Horn Mountains. As we conclude this plan revision over the next year or so, it will be more important than ever to consider your neighbor's thoughts and concerns for the Bighorn National Forest. With 270 million landowners of the Bighorn National Forest, our challenge is to insure every user and user group have fair access to the Forest in a responsible and sustainable way. The message I have heard loud and clear from people is one that maintains our ability to utilize the resources of the Bighorn National Forest now and for future generations.

*Bill Bass, Forest Supervisor*

# Bighorn National Forest Plan Revision



## Why does the Bighorn National Forest need *another* Plan?

The first Bighorn National Forest Plan went into effect in 1985. The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) established the forest planning process in 1976 with the intent that forest plans be revised every 10-15 years. A lot can change in that amount of time:

- New laws and regulations are passed;
- Species are listed or de-listed as Threatened or Endangered;
- Ecosystem science provides new information;
- Forest Service policies change;
- Public needs and interests change.

Forest Supervisors are required to review the conditions of the land at least every five years to determine if a plan revision is necessary. If monitoring and evaluation indicate that changes to the forest plan are needed and those changes can't be made through a more simple amendment to the plan, then it is necessary to revise the forest plan.

In the case of the Bighorn National Forest, after examining the 1985 forest plan, the Forest Supervisor concluded that many of the existing Forestwide goals and objectives, standards and guidelines, and management area prescriptions should be considered for change and therefore, recommended to the Regional Forester that the forest plan be revised.

During the forest plan revision process, we have focused on those sections of the plan that need to be changed. Rather than writing an entirely new plan, the intent is to **revise** the existing plan.

## What is in a Forest Plan?

One historian has called National forest planning "the most comprehensive planning process in the Western World." That translates into BIG. Here is some of what you'll find in a forest plan:

- **Goals, Objectives, and Strategies**, are expectations of the land and statements of where we want to go in the future and how we want to get there.
- **Standards and Guidelines** protect the environment and mitigate impacts as well as provide for certain desirable outputs.
- **Management areas** are specific geographic locations on the Forest. Management area standards and guidelines state which activities are permitted in each area.
- A **Monitoring Plan** ensures the Forest Service analysis and predictions are correct and identifies any needed changes.
- A plan determines **Suitability** of lands for timber harvest and other activities and the established Allowable Sale Quantity of timber that can be removed during a 10-year period.
- The plan makes **Recommendations to Congress** for the establishment of Wilderness Areas and Wild and Scenic Rivers.

## Just what *IS* a Forest Plan?

A forest plan is an overall guide for everything that happens on a National Forest. It is based on science, law and input from citizens like you. It is a broad, programmatic guide for management of the National Forest.

In a plan, we provide the direction to achieve the multiple uses you enjoy as one of 270 million landowners of the Bighorn National Forest. It also helps us fulfill our mission - to care for the land and serve the people.

## How does a Plan work?

Think of it as a zoning map for the Bighorn National Forest. In a city, some areas are zoned for commercial use, because that fits the need and capability of that area of the city. Other areas are zoned residential, where other uses are allowed which are compatible with the desired setting of that area (homes).

On a National Forest, we call the zones "Management Areas." Some management areas emphasize Wilderness, others may emphasize backcountry recreation, wildlife habitat, timber production or other goals.

A forest plan establishes standards and guidelines that limit or prohibit some activities. Where a city zoning ordinance might limit the maximum square footage of a building in a particular zoning classification, a particular management might include standards or guidelines that limit or preclude motorized travel.

## The Two Levels of Forest Planning

While forest plans provide broad scale, strategic direction on how the National Forest should be managed over the next 10-15 years. At a smaller scale, site-specific plans are completed prior to implementation of projects, such as timber plans, trail or campground construction, or road building.

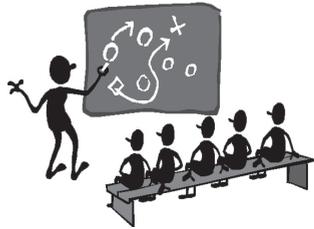
Just as city zoning does not require certain actions in a zone (i.e. this is a commercial zone so there *MUST* be a grocery store on this block!), forest plans do not call for or prescribe specific projects. Instead, they provide the guidance as to where specific activities *may* take place.



*Help shape the future of the Bighorn National Forest...  
Get involved in Forest Plan Revision!*

# The path to a revised Bighorn National Forest Plan...

**January 2001**  
Public meetings: Initial scoping



**2001**  
Compile existing condition assessments of the Forest



**2002**  
Draft goals & objectives, standards & guidelines, & preliminary alternatives

**January 2003**  
Public meetings: Review preliminary alternatives

**Fall/Winter 2003**  
Analyze effects of the various Plan alternatives



**April 2004**  
Select a Preferred Alternative for Draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

**June 2004**  
Publish Draft EIS and Draft Revised Plan. 90-day public comment period begins.

**July/August 2004**  
Hold public meetings: Discuss Draft EIS and Draft Plan and receive public input.

**Fall/Winter 2004**  
Correct/amend draft documents



**Summer 2005**  
Publish Final EIS and Final Revised Plan



A

# Draft Forest

C

B

## What are “Alternatives?”

Alternatives in the Draft represent differing approaches to meeting the underlying needs of each of the major revision issues and the philosophies of multiple use and ecosystem management. The alternatives provide basic protection for the forest resources and comply fully with environmental laws.

The major issues that were identified during the initial scoping process (November - December 2000) are:

- Biological and Habitat Diversity
- Dispersed Recreation and Travel Management
- Special Areas (Research Natural Areas, Wild and Scenic Rivers)
- Timber Suitability and management of forested lands.
- Wilderness / Roadless

These issues are considered major because they define the differences between the alternatives, generate different outputs, and will result in different future resource conditions.

## Management Areas

Management areas are a key “ingredient” in an alternative’s “flavor.” They are zones of the National Forest that emphasize certain management activities, such as wilderness, wildlife habitat, or forest products. However, the emphasis in a particular Management Area does not necessarily restrict other uses. For instance, recreation can occur in many places, including Management Areas that emphasize wildlife habitat or aspen regeneration.

The overall mix of management areas varies by alternative. For example, an alternative which places a higher emphasis on forest products (such as Alternative E) would have a larger amount of Forest acreage in Category 5 management areas, while an alternative with more emphasis on maintaining undeveloped recreation settings and greater amounts of nonmotorized recreation opportunities (such as alternative C) would have a larger amount of Forest acreage in Category 1.

The management area categories are listed below. On the next page, the overall composition of each alternative, by management area, is displayed.

### Category 1

- 1.11 Pristine Wilderness
- 1.13 Semi-Primitive Wilderness
- 1.2 Recommended Wilderness
- 1.31 Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized Use
- 1.32 Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized Summer Use w/Limited Winter Motorized Use
- 1.33 Backcountry Recreation Nonmotorized Summer Use w/Limited Winter & Summer Motorized Use
- 1.5 Wild Rivers

### Category 2

- 2.1 Special Interest Area
- 2.2 Research Natural Area

### Category 3

- 3.1 Special Interest Area (Medicine Wheel)
- 3.24 Riparian and Aquatic Ecosystem Management
- 3.31 Backcountry Recreation, Year-round Motorized Use
- 3.4 Scenic Rivers
- 3.5 Plant & Wildlife Habitat Management

## Is one alternative favored over the others?

The responsible official, the Regional Forester for the Rocky Mountain Region, has identified Alternative D as the preferred alternative, which will be used as the template to develop a final alternative.

It is anticipated that aspects of the other alternatives, as identified during the public comment period, will be incorporated into Alternative D for the final, selected, Forest Plan. The selection of a preferred alternative is an indication of the agency’s preference at this stage of analysis.

*Public comments on the effects analysis, new information, and additional analysis of effects are likely to result in refinement of the preferred alternative in the Final EIS or selection of a different alternative in the Record of Decision.*



### Category 4

- 4.2 Scenery
- 4.3 Dispersed Recreation
- 4.4 Recreation Rivers

### Category 5

- 5.11 Forest Vegetation Emphasis
- 5.12 Range Vegetation Emphasis
- 5.13 Forest Products
- 5.21 Water Yield Emphasis - Increase Water Yield, Vegetative Mgmt
- 5.4 Plant & Wildlife Habitat
- 5.41 Deer & Elk Winter Range
- 5.5 Dispersed Recreation & Forest Products

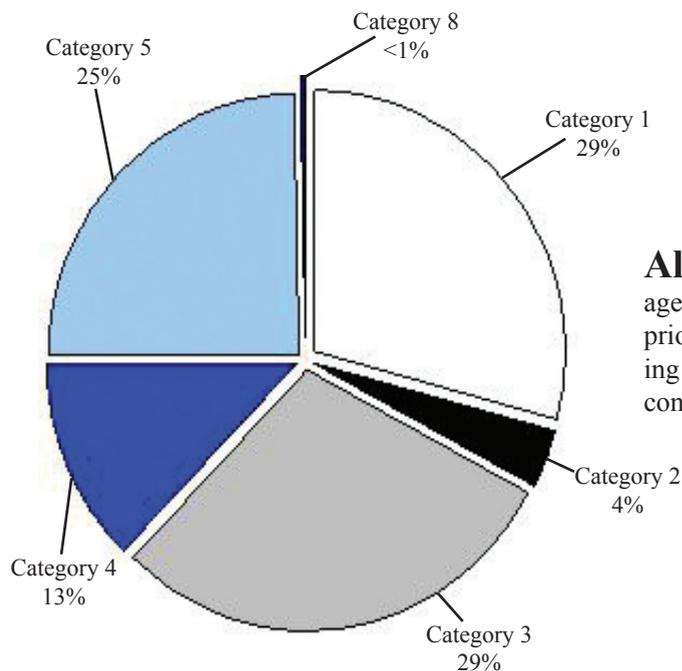
### Category 8

- 8.21 Water Impoundment - Twin Lakes, Tie Hack
- 8.22 Ski-based Resorts, Existing and Potential

# Plan Alternatives

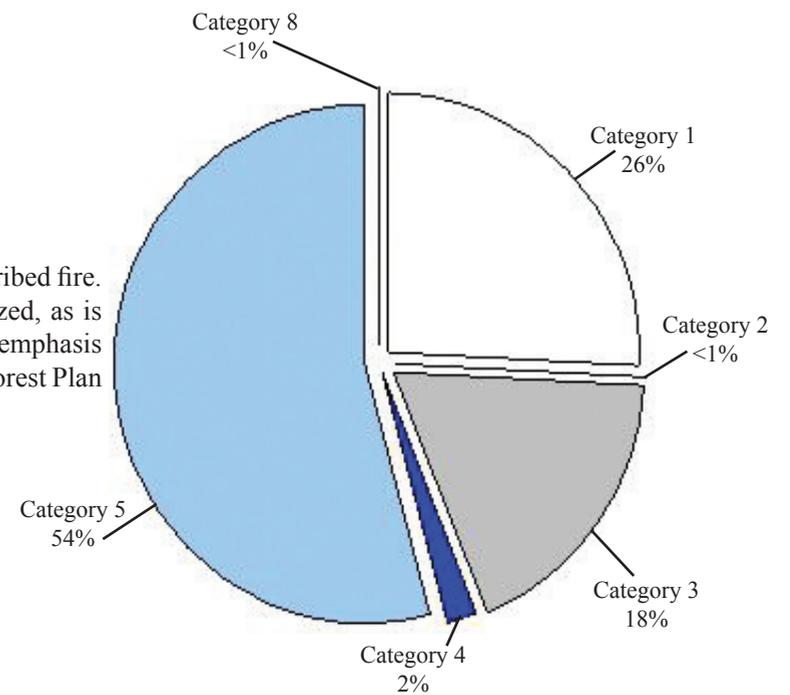
D

**Alternative A** emphasizes active vegetation management, primarily through timber harvest and prescribed fire. Production of sawtimber, firewood, and other wood products and forage for livestock grazing is emphasized, as is managing to diversify wildlife habitat. A mix of recreation opportunities is provided, with a greater potential emphasis on motorized recreation compared to the majority of alternatives. The program focus is similar to the 1985 Forest Plan since the current management area emphases are retained.

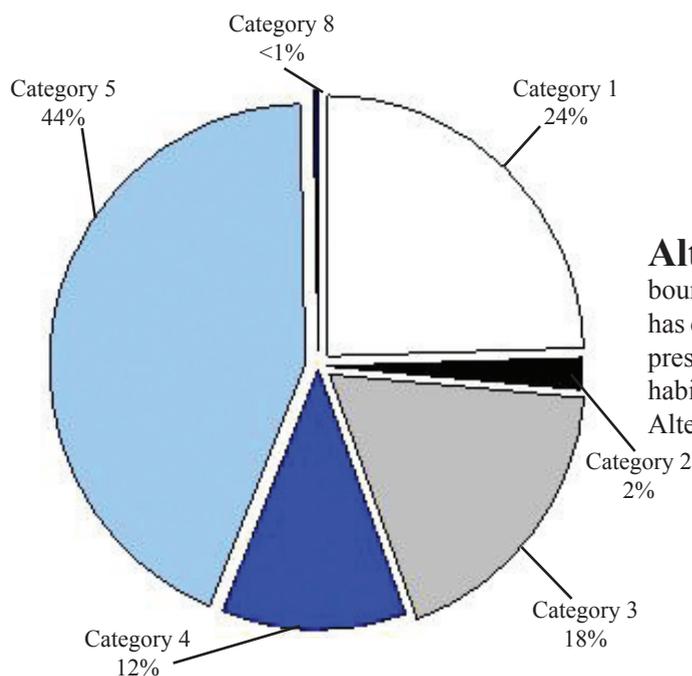


**Alternative B** was developed in response to public comment that the vegetation resources need active management to achieve biological and habitat diversity, while still providing a sustainable output of other forest uses. It prioritizes management of vegetation types, including timber harvest and fire, to improve wildlife habitat by allocating the most area to Management Area 3.5 compared to the other alternatives. This alternative explores the pros and cons of trying to improve plant and animal habitats with less road construction.

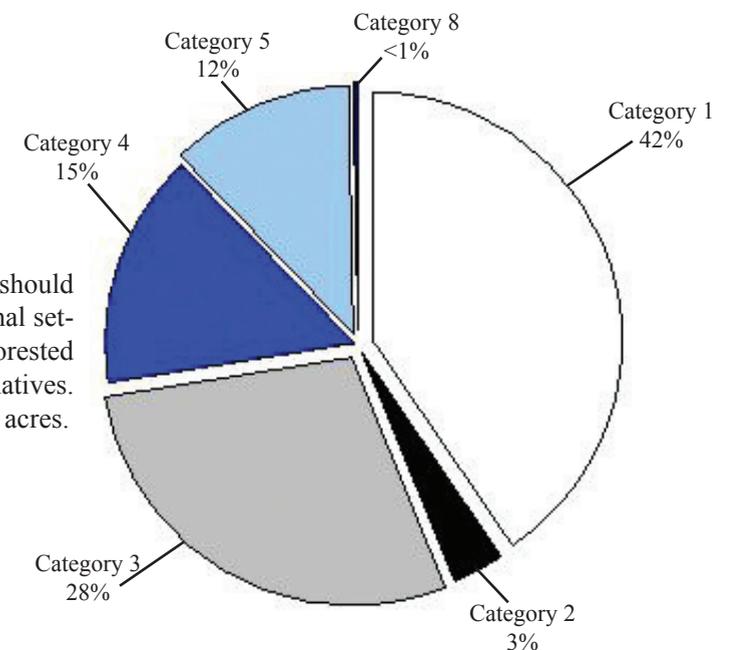
E



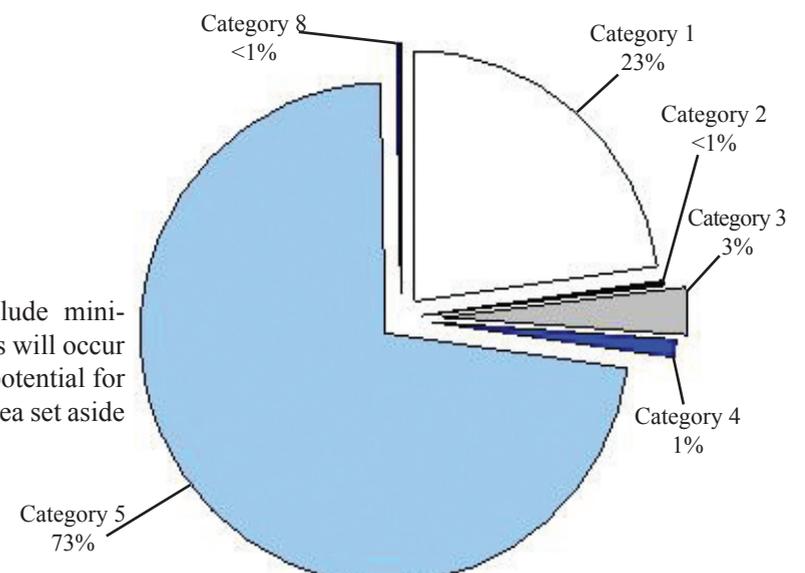
**Alternative C** was developed in response to public comment that the undeveloped land on the Forest should remain undeveloped to provide for nonmotorized opportunities, natural processes, and undeveloped recreational settings. It emphasizes natural processes to sustain ecological systems, including fish and wildlife habitat. Forested habitat successional changes will be dictated more by nature (fire, insects, and diseases) than in the other alternatives. Unlike the rest of the alternatives, this alternative includes a wilderness recommendation (MA 1.2) of 125,569 acres.



**Alternative D** was developed by reviewing past forest plan monitoring reports and adjusting management area boundaries and forest plan direction to reflect the changes in human uses, technologies, and scientific information that has occurred since the mid-1980s. It emphasizes active vegetation management, primarily through timber harvest and prescribed fire; providing sawtimber, firewood, and other wood products; livestock grazing; and diversifying wildlife habitat. It occupies the “mid range” in terms of overall mix of motorized and nonmotorized recreation opportunities. Alternative D as the preferred alternative, and will be used as the template to develop a final alternative.



**Alternative E** maximizes timber harvest opportunities. Forested vegetation desired conditions include minimal damage to commercial wood products from insects, disease, and fire. Wildlife habitat structural stages will occur in a relatively balanced distribution, with more early structural stages than in the other alternatives. The potential for additional motorized recreation opportunities will be greatest in this alternative, with the least amount of area set aside for nonmotorized recreation.



# Public Meeting information

## Should I attend a Forest Plan Revision public meeting?

Public comment meetings are a very important part of the plan revision process. It is your opportunity to affect alternatives as well as the analysis that will form the basis for a final decision.

It is also a convenient way of learning more about the issues and the management direction associated with the revised Forest Plan.

## What will happen at the meeting?

There will be a one-hour “open house” session at the beginning of the meeting where participants can stop at various stations and learn about specific topics as well as discuss concerns with a Bighorn National Forest representative.

The formal meeting will begin with a 30 minute presentation to orient everyone with the forest plan revision and the alternatives. Once the presentation has finished, attendees will work in small groups on issues of concern to them, and will share their findings and opinions with the larger group.

A question and answer period featuring Forest Supervisor Bill Bass will conclude the meeting.

## Can't attend one of the meetings?

Much of the information that will be presented at the meetings will also be available at the Forest website ([www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn](http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn)). Once there, click on “Projects and Plans”, then “Forest Plan Revision.”

You can submit comments to the Bighorn National Forest by sending them via email (email to: [r2\\_bighorn\\_planning@fs.fed.us](mailto:r2_bighorn_planning@fs.fed.us)) or mail them to...

Bighorn National Forest  
2013 Eastside Second St.  
Sheridan, WY 82801

Bighorn National Forest representatives are also available to attend a group or club meeting to answer questions and provide additional information.



*As one of the 270 million landowners of the Bighorn National Forest, these public meetings are a great opportunity to discuss forest plan-related issues of concern to YOU!*

## How important is my comment?

All comments on the Draft EIS and Draft Plan will be considered. As a result, alternatives may be modified; new alternatives may be identified and analyzed; analysis may be expanded, modified or adjusted; or factual corrections to the analysis may be made.

There are a few important points that you need to know about so that the Bighorn National Forest can get the most out of your review of these documents.

- A substantive comment provides factual information, professional opinion, or informed judgement that is relevant to the action being proposed. In other words, a comment such as “Your comment does nothing to reduce the threat of global warming” is not germane to the action being proposed. However, a comment such as “Management direction for the 4.3 Management Area - Dispersed Recreation - should do a better job of promoting motorized access” would be considered a substantive comment and one which would be considered relevant to the action being proposed in revising the Forest Plan.

- This is not a voting process. Comments are considered on the basis of content, not quantity. In other words, 100 identical pre-printed post cards submitted by a group of individuals will be considered as one comment since they all say the same thing.

- While all comments on the DEIS and Draft Plan will be considered, we can only provide detailed responses in the FEIS to substantive comments.



*Local residents discussing Forest Plan issues. Sheridan, November 2000.*

## A Steering Committee perspective...

A unique feature of our public involvement process is the structure and operation of the Forest Plan Steering Committee. In addition to Forest Service members, the steering committee also consists of State of Wyoming agencies, county commissioners, and conservation district board members. The steering committee assists the Forest by offering strategic advice and expertise to the process. While their involvement in the collaborative process is a critical component of the revision process, Steering Committee consensus on a particular issue is not a requirement.

Included here are position statements submitted by each of the three external groups serving on the steering committee regarding the Bighorn National Forest's Plan Revision process.

### State of Wyoming perspective:

"Dear Concerned Citizen:

The Bighorn National Forest is an important and valued resource to local, state and national citizens. People love the Bighorn for its accessibility, beauty, wildlife, recreational opportunities, spiritual importance, clean water and fisheries. It can be both a place to seek solitude and a place to bring family and friends together to share a diversity of experiences.

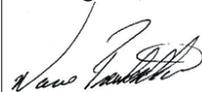
The Forest Plan now under revision will lay out a strategy to share those resources among competing and often changing human values. Solitude vs. development, active management vs. natural processes, motorized vs. non-motorized use, commodity vs. non-commodity use – all these debates and more must be taken into consideration.

State agencies and Bighorn counties and conservation districts have been involved as cooperators in the draft plan and accompanying environmental impact statement. Many of the conflicting values have been discussed – in depth – during numerous meetings over the past several years.

But now is the time that forest administrators and the cooperators want to hear from you. What are your thoughts? Is there a balance to be struck between competing resources? Do you have ideas on win/win situations for the final plan? How can the plan be improved? What do you want the forest to look like in the next 10 years? Is your concern or interest appropriately addressed in the draft plan and EIS?

I encourage you to attend the open houses, learn the issues and the pros and cons for various management choices for the Bighorn National Forest. Visit with your county commissioners, your state agencies and your conservation district representatives – but, most importantly, let the U.S. Forest Service know what you think. I know you have much to contribute.

Best regards,



Dave Freudenthal, Governor"

### Conservation District perspective:

"Citizens of the Bighorn National Forest Area,

In July and August, the staff of the Bighorn National Forest and local members serving on the Advisory Steering Committee will host local public meetings regarding the Bighorn National Forest Plan Revision and the various alternatives. The exact time and place of these meetings will be published in local newspapers as well as announced on the radio. The purpose of the public meetings is to ask the public to comment on the draft plan and the various alternatives that have been developed in the planning revision process.

The Plan Revision process began in 2000 with public "scoping" meetings. The planning process has continued forward with 25 meetings of the Bighorn National Forest staff and the local members of the Advisory Steering Committee (County Commissioners and Conservation Districts adjacent to the Forest and the state of Wyoming). These meetings have been open to the public.

The purpose of this letter is to strongly encourage local citizens to attend these public meetings and to share comments regarding the draft plan and the various plan alternatives that have been developed.

This is an opportunity for you, the public, to make a real difference in the plan revision draft and a preferred alternative and to go on record with regard to likes and dislikes about the plan revision. The final plan will be utilized to manage the Bighorn National Forest for the next 15 years and, therefore, it is extremely important that the grassroots people of the area surrounding the Forest attend these public meetings and make known their opinions and feelings.

We encourage your attendance and your comments!

Sincerely,

Lake DeSmet Conservation District  
Powder River Conservation District  
Sheridan County Conservation District  
Shoshone Conservation District  
South Big Horn Conservation District  
Washakie County Conservation District"

### County commission perspective:

"County Government Coalition Actively Involved in Revision of Bighorn Forest Plan

Bighorn, Johnson, Sheridan, and Washakie Counties have joined together to form a Coalition of local governments. The goal of the Coalition is to help develop a revised Bighorn Forest Plan that best meets the needs of local communities and its citizens over the fifteen-year life of the plan. The planning relationship between the counties and the Forest Service was formalized in a 2003 Memorandum of Understanding designating each county as a "Cooperating Agency". Cooperating Agency status is significant as it gives counties an assured say in the process. National Environmental Policy Act guidelines state the lead agency shall "Use the environmental analyses and proposals of cooperating agencies with jurisdiction by law or special expertise, to the maximum extent possible...consistent with its responsibility as a lead agency". The counties have already participated in three years of Steering Committee meetings, in which several concerns and needs have been expressed by the Counties. Although progress has been made to satisfy some of the issues, some important issues remain unresolved as the Draft Bighorn Forest Plan is being printed.

A recent survey of the County Commissioners of the four counties confirmed that fire risk, water quality and yield-, the local economy, potential effects of managing for lynx, and assuring active timber management and timber product flow are priority issues to the Counties. Also of importance is maintaining economically and ecologically sustainable levels of grazing, maintaining and enhancing motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities, and healthy wildlife populations.

The Coalition recognizes that sustainable resources and communities will be better off if large working landscapes of private and public lands are maintained to avoid the subdivisions that have adversely affected many parts of the West. To be successful, ranches need a reliable commitment of assured public land grazing to remain viable and local mills need active management of timber that maintains local jobs and provides local products. The Coalition feels that important community-specific economic data, such as the 150 sawmill jobs in Sheridan should be fully considered in the Bighorn Forest Plan. To date, the USFS has been remiss in acknowledging and incorporating community specific data into its planning efforts. The Coalition feels there are plentiful opportunities to both maintain the natural resources and outdoor lifestyles enjoyed by residents and tourists, as well as the working landscapes important to the economic and social well being of local communities.

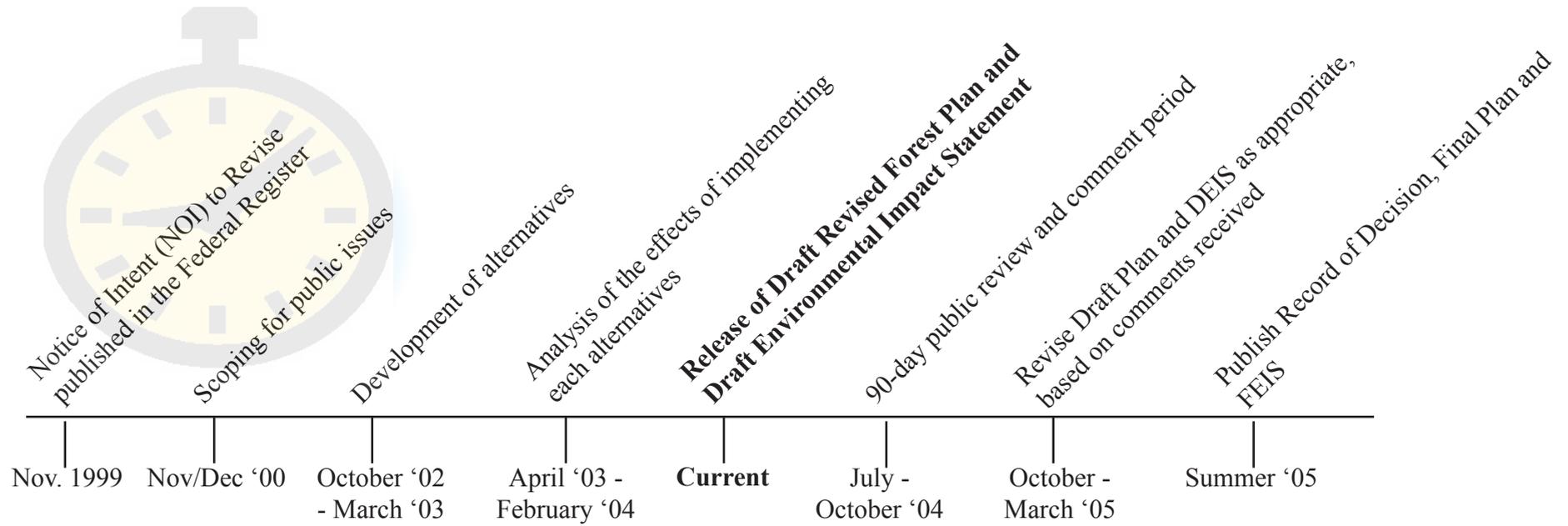
To provide professional support, the Coalition has retained the services of Ecosystem Research Group (ERG), a Montana based natural resource consulting firm. The firm has begun professional analysis of natural resource issues and opportunities and developed strategies to assure the needs of the Counties' citizens are met in the final plan. ERG has already interfaced with professionals within the Forest Service and has begun to analyze data, assumptions and policies of the Forest Service affecting the revised Forest Plan. A critical review of the timber model and some of the practices that decrease timber outputs and make timber management less economically viable is now underway. The need to assure the livestock industry of future stability by committing to a target quantity of animal unit months (AUMs) is being pursued through interagency negotiations. Citizens desiring to express their opinion about Bighorn NF issues can contact their individual county commissioner directly or can contribute to the issue list on ERG website: [http://ecosystemrg.com/bighorn\\_comm.html](http://ecosystemrg.com/bighorn_comm.html). Comments and suggestions that are specific are the most useful.

Big Horn County Commission  
Johnson County Commission  
Sheridan County Commission  
Washakie County Commission"



University of Wyoming Economist David "Tex" Taylor discusses forest plan economic issues with the steering committee at their April 2003 meeting.

# Forest Plan Revision Timeline



We're on the Web at  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r2/bighorn>  
 Call or write  
 307-674-2600  
 2013 Eastside Second Street  
 Sheridan, WY 82801



**Bighorn National Forest**  
 2013 Eastside Second Street  
 Sheridan, WY 82801  
 Phone 307-674-2600  
 Fax 307-674-2668  
 E-mail: [r2\\_bighorn\\_planning@fs.fed.us](mailto:r2_bighorn_planning@fs.fed.us)



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