

Green Mountain National Forest Plan Revision Process Situation Assessment

Prepared by
Adamant Accord, Inc.
for the
Green Mountain National Forest
and the
U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution

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Executive Summary

The Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) consists of approximately 385,000 acres in the Green Mountains of central and southern Vermont. The USDA Forest Service is required to develop Land and Resource Management Plans (or "Forest Plans") for all national forests. Forest Plans guide land use and forest management decisions within forest boundaries. The current GMNF Plan was adopted in 1987.

The GMNF is working with the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and Adamant Accord, Inc. to develop a process for fully involving the public in the Forest Plan revision process. This report describes the results of a situation assessment conducted by Adamant Accord, and includes recommendations for effective public involvement in the Forest Plan revision process.

Historically, the GMNF has been managed and used for many purposes. These uses include hunting, fishing, hiking, growth and harvest of timber and other forest products, subsistence living, cross-country and downhill skiing, and snow-mobiling. Consequently, the Forest Plan revision process is of interest to, and affects, a wide variety of individuals and organizations.

Cindy Cook of Adamant Accord, Inc. worked with Forest Service staff to identify key forest stakeholders that represent a broad range of perspectives. This report is based upon the findings from her interviews of close to 80 people.

Key issues identified during the assessment include:

- ◆ **Timber:** Many stakeholders are very frustrated that there has been almost no timber harvested from the GMNF in the past several years. While almost everyone interviewed supports a viable timber program on the forest, opinions vary regarding the role of timber harvesting on the forest.
- ◆ **Wilderness:** A proposal to increase the amount of Congressionally-designated Wilderness on the forest has been, and is likely to continue to be, hotly debated.
- ◆ **Recreational Use:** An apparent increase in recreational use on the GMNF has led to conflict between user groups with varying needs.
- ◆ **Wildlife Habitat Management and Biodiversity:** Most stakeholders seem to be in agreement that the GMNF should be managed to enhance wildlife habitat and biodiversity. However, there are significant differences of opinion regarding wildlife habitat management goals.

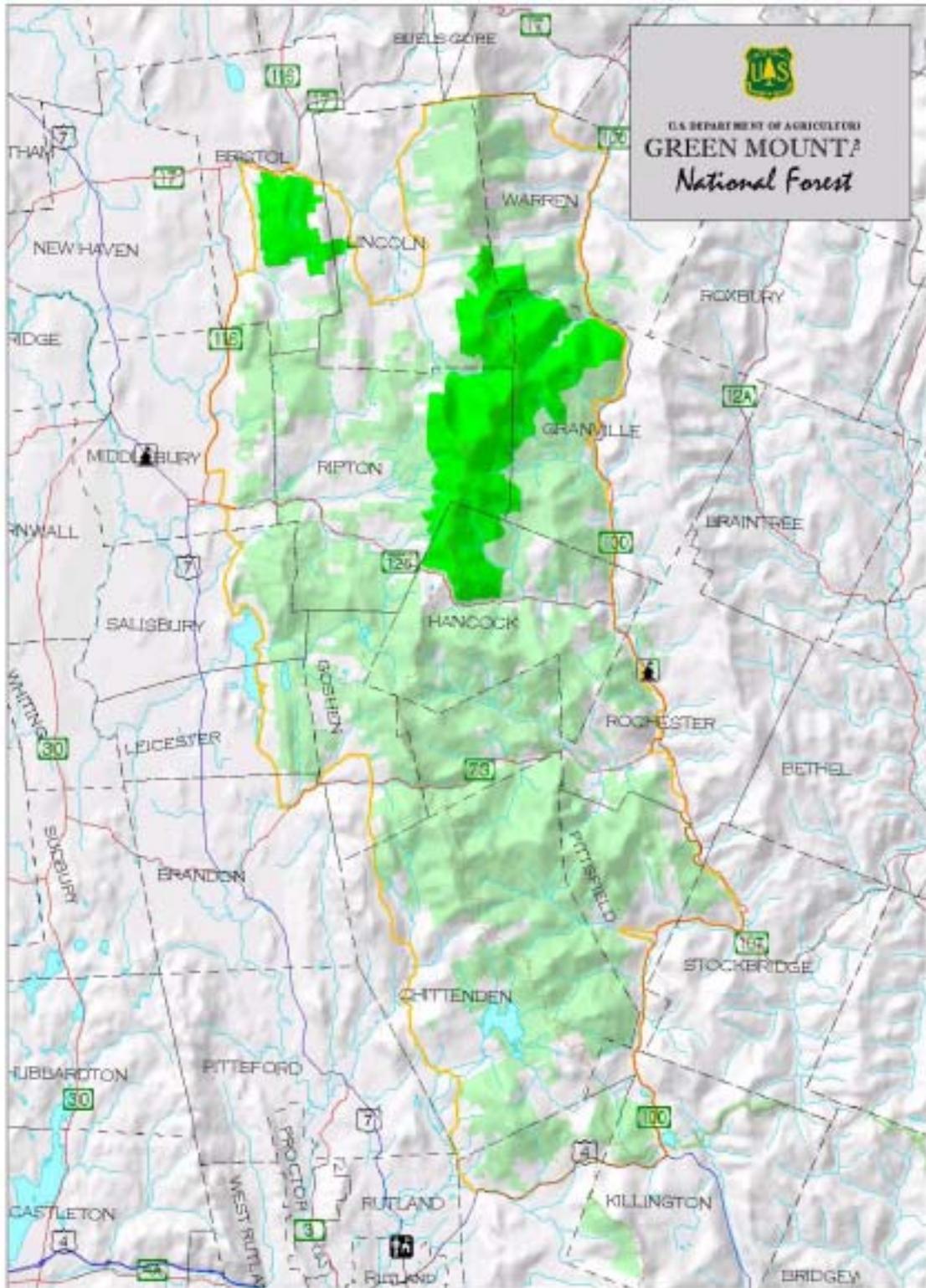
Themes from interviews include:

- ◆ Stakeholders want a better understanding of the Forest Service's planning process and opportunities for public input into that process. The public wants a clear understanding of how the planning process will unfold, including clear, concise, jargon-free information about the planning process and how the Forest Service will make develop alternatives and select a preferred alternative,
- ◆ Stakeholders want increased opportunities for dialogue with the Forest Service staff and with each other, and
- ◆ People want the Forest Service to clarify its role in the Forest Plan revision process.

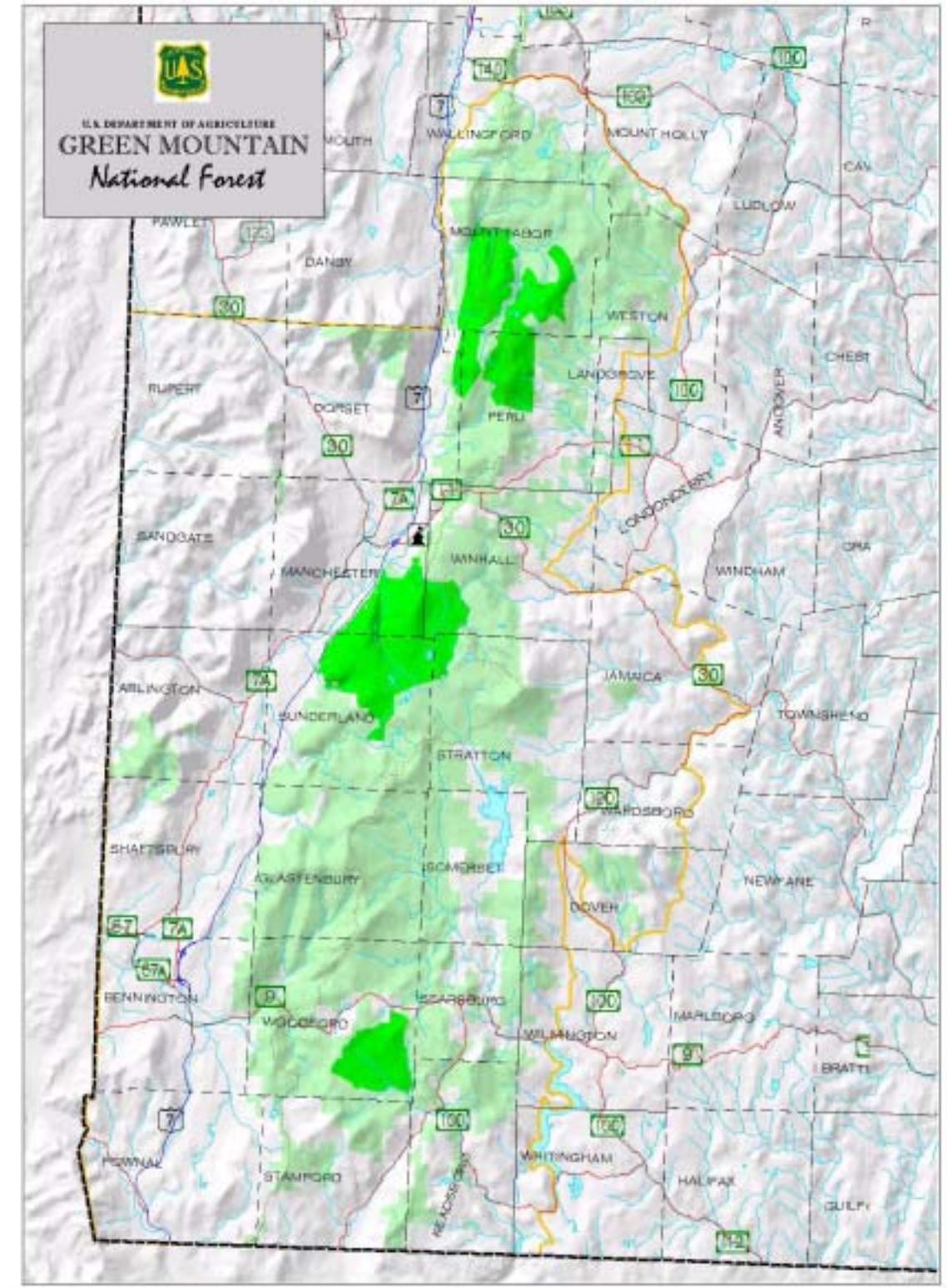
Recommendations by Adamant Accord as to how to respond to challenges to involving the public fully and effectively in the Forest Plan revision process are organized around six central themes:

1. Provide clear, concise information regarding the Forest Plan revision process and opportunities for public input,
2. Create increased opportunities for dialogue,
3. Provide a range of participation opportunities,
4. Develop a collaborative process for building agreement ,
5. Clarify the Forest Service's role in the Forest Plan revision process, and
6. Clarify how the Forest Service will address the Wilderness proposal and timber program issues in the Forest Plan revision process.

North Half of the Green Mountain National Forest



South Half of the Green Mountain National Forest



Background

The Green Mountain National Forest's Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP) is the Forest Service's basic planning tool; it sets Forest-wide goals and objectives and prescribes land use areas and activities that are allowed within each area. A Forest Plan serves as the primary decision document regarding forest planning and management and includes the following elements¹:

- ◆ Forest-wide multiple use goals and objectives,
- ◆ Forest-wide management requirements,
- ◆ Management area direction,
- ◆ Lands suited and not suited for timber management,
- ◆ Monitoring and evaluation requirements, and
- ◆ Recommendations to Congress for wilderness area, recreation area, and other special designations.

The GMNF has identified the following desired outcomes of Forest Plan revision process:

- ◆ A collective vision for the role of the National Forest in northern New England
- ◆ Strong partnerships and collaborative relationships among the Forest Service, the public, and other land management agencies that continue into the implementation of the new LRMP.
- ◆ Improved techniques to encourage stakeholders to work together and resolve conflicts as they arise.
- ◆ Improved information base for decision making.
- ◆ Improved implementation of the Forest Plan.
- ◆ Updated and improved Forest Plan and techniques for monitoring and evaluation.
- ◆ Updated, improved Forest Plan that provides for healthy ecosystems and sustainable management practices by using best science and techniques practicable.
- ◆ Improved understanding of the difference between Forest Plan revision and Forest Plan implementation.

History of the Current GMNF Plan Revision Process

The Forest Service is required to update national forest plans every 10 to 15 years. The GMNF is currently operating under its 1987 Forest Plan.

The GMNF began the current Forest Plan revision process six years ago in the fall of 1996. The planning process continued 2 years but was then halted by a Congressional moratorium. During the initial planning process from the fall of 1996 through the summer of 1998, the Forest Service planning team worked with five regionally-based Public Planning Groups within the forest area. In

¹ GMNF Notice of Intent, Federal Register, Vol 67, No 85, page 22044

conjunction with these groups, the Forest Service reviewed the performance of the current Forest Plan, developed a list of issues to be addressed during Forest Plan revision and developed a series of "issue papers". The Public Planning Groups were created to provide an opportunity for dialogue across stakeholder groups. Based upon the work of these groups, the Forest Service developed 24 issue papers that summarize by issue public comments and management concerns, the current Forest Plan's direction, and current information related to each topic.

In the fall of 1998, Congress halted all LRMP revisions while it developed a revised national planning rule. At that point, all activities related to the Public Planning Groups on the GMNF stopped. In the fall of 2000, the GMNF received funding to resume the LRMP revision process and by winter 2001 GMNF staff were revising and updating the "plan to plan". The GMNF planning process began again informally in October 2001. On May 2, 2002, the Forest Service published a "Notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement and a revised Land and Resources Management Plan for the Green Mountain Forest" in the *Federal Register*. This notice provided the legal basis to re-start the GMNF plan revision process².

In the fall of 2001, the Forest Service conducted a series of public meetings to describe the Forest Plan revision process. Public workshops on the "Role of Forest" were convened in March 2002. These workshops were an attempt to reach consensus amongst participants regarding the role that Forest land should play in the region. GMNF staff also convened a series of educational forums during the fall, winter and spring of 2001- 2002 on Timber Management, Recreation, Forest History and Wilderness.

In November 2001 the Vermont Wilderness Association (a coalition of 15+ environmental groups and individuals) presented a wilderness proposal to the Forest Service and the Vermont congressional delegation. There are currently 58,874 acres of designated Wilderness (15% of the GMNF acreage) and 22,760 acres of National Recreation Areas (6% of the GMNF acreage) within the Green Mountain National Forest. The proposal called for congressional designation of approximately 79,2000 additional acres of Wilderness, congressional designation of 45,000 additional acres of National Recreation Areas (NRA), and congressional designation of approximately 15,000 acres of National Conservation Area (NCA) within the Green Mountain National Forest.

The presentation of the Wilderness proposal has affected the Forest Plan revision process by shifting public interest and debate from comprehensive forest planning to a referendum on wilderness designation.

2. On December 6, 2002 a new proposed planning rule, USDA Forest Service National Forest System Land Management Planning regulations CFR 219.12, was published in the Federal Register. As of now the Green Mountain National Forest is continuing plan revision under the 1982 rule. After the new rule is finalized, there will be discussion on whether the GMNF will continue with the 1982 rule or transition to the 2002 rule. The Green Mountain National Forest is committed to extensive public involvement and use of available and relevant science no matter what rule is used for revising the Forest Plan.

The GMNF is committed to working with the public to develop:

- ◆ forest wide goals and objectives,
- ◆ descriptions and definitions of management areas,
- ◆ desired conditions statements, and
- ◆ standards and guidelines for management areas.³

The Forest Service staff and contractors are currently conducting inventories and assessments. These studies are being conducted to gather up-to-date information regarding a wide variety of resources on the GMNF. Once these studies are completed, the information will be used as a basis for the planning process.

Inventories and assessments are being conducted in the following topic areas:

- Species evaluation
- Water resources assessment
- Air assessment
- Soils assessment
- Terrestrial assessment
- Forest (tree) Inventory on Newly Acquired Lands
- Roadless inventory & wilderness evaluation
- Wild & scenic rivers eligibility
- Heritage resources overview & assessment
- Road analysis process
- Socio-economic assessment
- Recreational Opportunity Spectrum
- Other smaller ecological assessments on the Taconics and the escarpment area
- Special forest products

Once the inventory and assessment phase is completed, the Forest Service plans to work with the public to develop desired future condition statements, delineate, map and describe management areas, and develop standards and guidelines for each management area.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) both require that the Forest Service develop a range of alternatives for consideration in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Forest Service will analyze the effects of the alternatives in the Draft EIS, receive and analyze public comment on the DEIS and record the rationale for its final decision regarding the Forest Plan through a Record of Decision (ROD). The GMNF plans to complete the planning process by June 2005.

Changes Since the Adoption of the 1987 Forest Plan

A number of factors have changed since the adoption of the current Forest Plan in 1987. These changes include:

³ GMNF Notice of Intent, Federal Register, Vol 67, No 85, page 22044

- ◆ 85,599 acres of the forest's 385,000 acres were acquired since the development of the 1987 Forest Plan,
- ◆ Continued fragmentation of large parcels of land has increased recreational and timber industry pressure on national forest land,
- ◆ Public debate in Vermont regarding the use of public lands has been intense and often quite heated,
- ◆ Public recreational use of the forest seems to have increased significantly⁴,
- ◆ Public views regarding wilderness have changed,
- ◆ Silvicultural and ecosystem science and management has evolved, and
- ◆ Timber harvesting has essentially stopped on the GMNF, due in part to law suits and administrative appeals of timber sale proposals.

Collectively, these changes are likely to have a significant effect on the plan revision process and the content of the revised Forest Plan.

Requirements and Constraints to the Forest Plan Revision Process

The Green Mountain National Forest Plan revision process is subject to a number of requirements and constraints. These include federal laws that relate to on the ground management practices and require the GMNF to meet certain standards including:

- Maintain and restore chemical, physical and biological integrity of surface waters – Clean Water Act
- Protect and enhance the quality of air resources – Clean Air Act
- Conserve threatened and endangered species – Endangered Species Act
- Preserve and protect historic and archeological sites and resources – National Historic Preservation Act And Archeological Resources Protection Act
- Provide for multiple uses: outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed and wildlife and fish - this does not, however, mean every use on every area or even on every National Forest - Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act
- Develop and administer renewable energy resources – Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act
- Provide for viability of native and desirable non-native species – National Forest Management Act

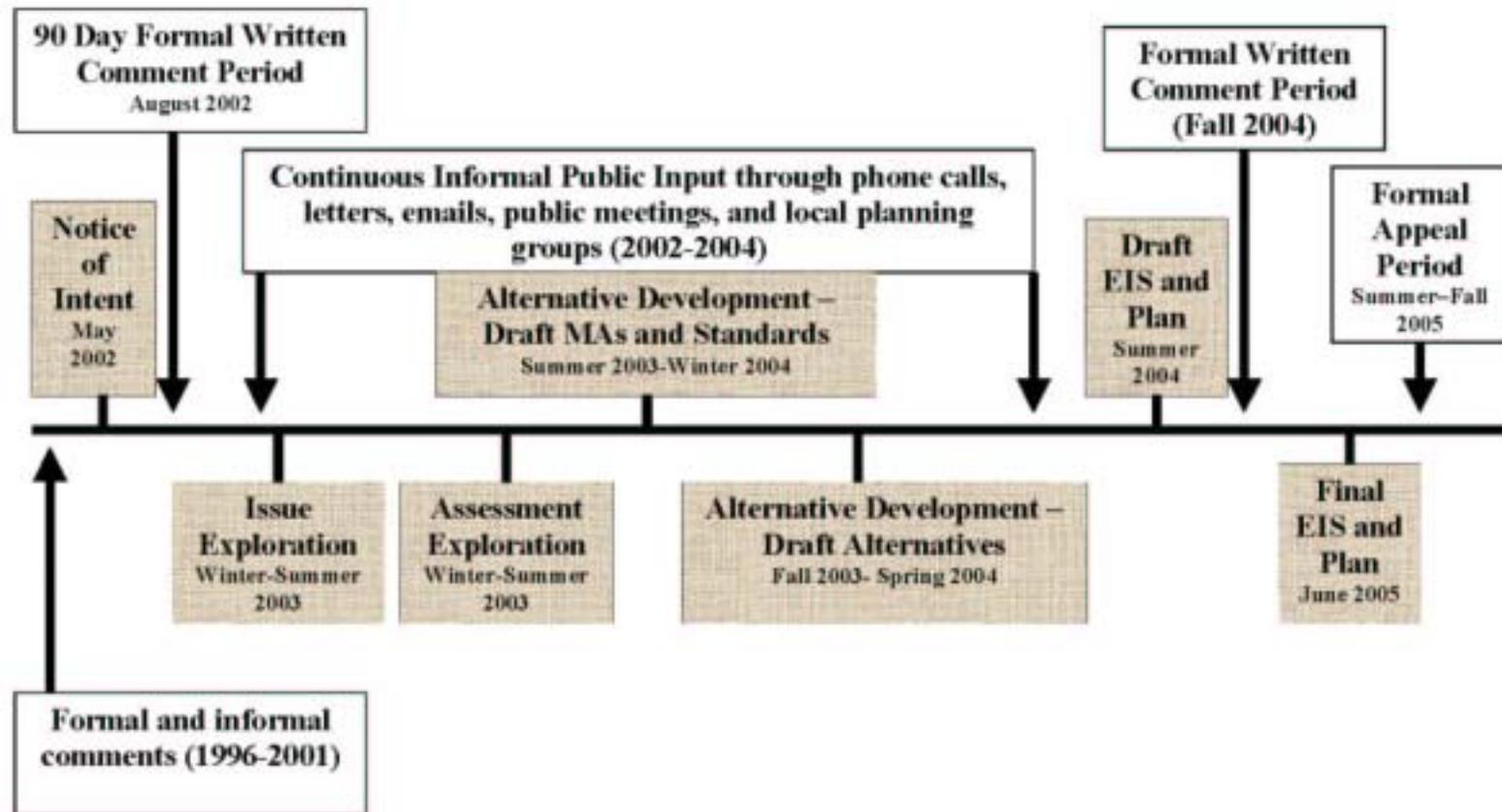
⁴ There is no baseline data regarding historic recreational use of the forest.

Some requirements and constraints relate to the planning process and the contents of a Forest Plan. The National Forest Management Act requirements include:

- Goals and objectives
- Management descriptions and areas
- Monitoring and evaluation methods
- Identification of lands not suited for timber harvesting
- Allowable timber sale quantities
- Roadless area evaluations and a Wilderness recommendation
- Identification of habitats critical to threatened and endangered species
- Numerous inventories and evaluations on a variety of resource areas

Other federal laws that are relevant to the forest planning process are the National Environmental Policy Act, intended to disclose to the public the environmental impacts of federal actions, and the Federal Advisory Committee Act that governs the creation and purpose of advisory committees working with federal agencies. These are the major requirements but the above list is by no means all inclusive. Along with following federal laws and requirements, the GMNF must also coordinate with the planning efforts of other Federal agencies, state and local governments.

Plan Revision Timeline: Green Mountain National Forest



The Assessment Process

The U.S.D.A. Forest Service (Forest Service) is committed to using collaborative and innovative community involvement techniques in its Forest Plan revision processes. The Forest Service sought the assistance of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution⁵ (the "Institute") to help design and implement collaborative public involvement processes as part of its plan revision process.

The Green Mountain National Forest (GMNF) is in the process of revising its Land and Resource Management Plan (or "Forest Plan"). In July 2002, the Institute, on behalf of the Green Mountain National Forest contracted with Cindy Cook of Adamant Accord, Inc. to conduct a situation assessment, to present recommendations on the design of an effective public involvement program to support the on-going forest planning process, and to assist the GMNF planning team in implementing a community involvement program for the GMNF plan revision process.

As part of its partnership with the Institute, GMNF secured the services of professional facilitator Cindy Cook of Adamant Accord, Inc. to assist in engaging the public and key stakeholder groups in the Green Mountain Forest Plan revision process. Ms. Cook began working with the GMNF planning staff and key stakeholders in late summer of 2002 to design and then conduct an assessment of current issues of interest and needs of key stakeholder groups. The assessment was designed to provide the GMNF planning staff with up-to-date information from individuals and key stakeholder groups about their needs and expectations about contributing to and participating in the Forest Plan revision process, and to design a Forest Plan revision process that meets the needs of the stakeholders.

Particular emphasis was placed on identifying ideas people have about how the GMNF can be most effective in involving the public in its Forest Plan revision process. This assessment report also provides specific recommendations, from Adamant Accord, Inc. for the development of a broad-based process for public involvement. These recommendations are based upon information received during the interviews, requirements of the Forest Planning Revision process; and Ms. Cook's professional experience with designing and implementing community involvement processes.

Ms. Cook interviewed 77 people for this situation assessment. Most of the interviews were conducted between September 1 and October 9, 2002

In consultation with the GMNF planning staff, Ms. Cook developed a list of individuals to be interviewed. She sought to interview people who have played a significant role in the GMNF Forest Plan revision process and/or leaders or spokespeople for key interest groups, including state officials, timber industry representatives, sportsmen, recreational groups, environmental groups,

⁵ The Institute is a federal program established by the U.S. Congress to assist parties in resolving environmental, natural resource, and public land conflicts. The Institute serves as an impartial non-partisan body, providing professional expertise, services, and resources to all parties involved in such disputes, regardless of who initiates or pays for assistance.

and town officials. The list of those to be interviewed included Forest Service employees who have been and will continue to be involved in the planning process, and several retired Forest Service employees.

At the end of each interview, Ms. Cook asked each person if they could provide the names of other people who might want to be interviewed as part of the assessment process. Many of the names that were provided were people who had been interviewed already. Additional people suggested were interviewed as time permitted. Additional interviewees were identified to represent stakeholder groups to ensure that a broad diversity of interests were represented in the assessment.

Many of those interviewed have multiple interests, and many people are not easily categorized. The following estimates are given in an attempt to portray the range of people interviewed, not to "pigeon-hole" them in a particular category. Of those interviewed:

- 14 represent timber industry interests,
- 11 represent environmental advocacy interests,
- 8 have a primary interests in recreation,
- 7 were primarily interested in wildlife issues,
- 4 represent sporting interests,
- 2 represent Native American interests, and
- 1 is a ski industry representative.

Twelve current or former Forest service employees, four state agency representatives and three local government officials were interviewed. At least nine of the people interviewed do not fit into any of the above categories, and are most aptly described as interested citizens.

Most of the interviews were conducted in-person, and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes; four interviews were conducted by telephone to reduce travel time. Telephone interviews ranged from 20 to 90 minutes in length. One interview was conducted during the course of a regularly scheduled meeting of the organization's board of directors; all other interviews were conducted individually. A list of people interviewed is attached in Appendix A.

This draft assessment has been reviewed by the Forest Service and Institute staff to ensure that the information it contains is accurate. Public Involvement Specialist Marion Cox of Re◆Source Associates reviewed and commented on an initial draft of this report.

The Forest Service will distribute this draft report to all those interviewed for their review and comment. Ms. Cook will revise the report in response to comments, and the final assessment will serve as the basis for public involvement for the remainder of the GMNF Forest Plan revision process.

Assessment Findings

Key Issues

While discussions regarding future use of public land invariably involve a multitude of inter-connected issues, the assessment interviews revealed that these issues generally fall into four broad categories:

1. Wilderness designation,
2. Timber management,
3. Wildlife habitat management and biodiversity, and
4. Conflicting recreational uses.

These issues are discussed in more detail below.

Wilderness and other Congressional Designation of National Forest Land

In November 2001 the Vermont Wilderness Association (a coalition of 15+ environmental groups and individuals) presented a Wilderness proposal to the Forest Service and the Vermont congressional delegation. The proposal calls for congressional designation of an additional approximately 79,000 acres of Wilderness, 45,000 acres of National Recreation Areas and 15,000 acres of National Conservation Area within the Green Mountain National Forest.

As part of the planning process, the Forest Service is required⁶ to make recommendations to Congress regarding special designation such as potential Wilderness areas within the forest. The Forest Service is also required to make recommendations to the Forest Service Regional Forester on the designation of Research Natural Areas during the planning process. Legislative enactment of Wilderness Areas and other special designations can be made by Congressional vote at any time.

Since the Vermont Wilderness Association made its proposal for additional Wilderness in November of 2001, Wilderness debate has dominated most meetings related to the Forest Plan revision process. Wilderness proponents note that the last legislation that designated Wilderness in Vermont was enacted in 1984 in the midst of the previous planning process, and that much additional national forest land was acquired after the 1987 Forest Plan went into effect. Supporters of the Wilderness proposal believe that public lands should be managed for uses that are not possible on private lands. They point to increased pressure on public land to provide recreational and spiritual opportunities as well as growing public support for wilderness.

Forest products industry representatives and sportsmen who want additional early successional habitat that supports game species oppose the creation of additional Wilderness. They argue that there is no way to ensure that areas that are defined for timber management and harvesting in the Forest Plan will, in actuality, be harvested.

Most of the people interviewed did not characterize themselves as either "pro" or "anti" Wilderness. They indicated that they might support the creation of some additional Wilderness, but would like the Forest Service to have an opportunity to gather and analyze information about the proposal and its impacts on the timber products industry, recreation, local communities and other interests

⁶ 36 CFR 219.17

before a Wilderness bill is introduced. Gathering information about potential Wilderness and other special designations is part of the standard Forest Plan revision process.

Many of the people interviewed expressed uneasiness about the relationship of the Wilderness proposal to the planning process. Several people said that the planning process might become “a waste of time” if the Vermont Congressional delegation sought to enact a Wilderness bill before the forest planning process is completed.

Timber Management

Almost all interviewees support some timber harvesting on the GMNF. All interest groups seem to be in agreement that the Forest Service has an important role to play in educating the public regarding silvicultural issues. Many people suggested that the Forest Service take a more active role in public education, including the development and presentation of written materials and in developing, implementing and educating the public about “Best Practices” demonstration projects.

Those interviewed differ in their opinions as to how much timber harvesting should be permitted on the GMNF. Some believe that cutting should be limited to demonstration projects, while others believe that the GMNF should be managed to provide on-going sources of commercial timber.

The discovery of Indiana bats (a federally endangered species) near the GMNF led to a stoppage of timber harvesting project planning in 1998. Many people interviewed believe that appeals of Forest Service timber harvesting proposals by environmental groups have become increasingly common in the past ten years.

Forest Service staff note that there has been a significant reduction in timber harvesting on the GMNF over the past ten years. No new timber sale decisions were made from the Fall of 1998 until the Fall of 2002. Many people interviewed expressed frustration that timber harvesting that was envisioned in the 1987 Forest Plan has not been conducted. They believe that appeals and lawsuits have been largely responsible for what they refer to as timber harvesting “gridlock”.

Wildlife Habitat Management and Biodiversity

All parties seem to be in agreement that forest lands should be managed to enhance wildlife habitat and biodiversity. However, there are significant differences of opinion regarding wildlife habitat and biodiversity goals.

All parties indicate that they want a healthy mix of forest successional phases. Of particular interest is the relative amount of early successional habitat and mature forests within the GMNF. Sporting and timber interests want early successional habitat to support game species. They advocate for the amount of early successional habitat envisioned in the 1987 Forest Plan. Environmental advocacy groups⁷ are interested in a mix of habitat types that supports biodiversity. In general, they want that less newly-harvested land, smaller harvested areas, and more areas of mature forests.

⁷ I have avoided using the term “environmentalist”, as most of the people with an interest in the Forest consider themselves to be environmentalists.

Recreational Use

Recreational use of the GMNF seems to have increased significantly in the past 10-15 years⁸. Both the types of recreational uses and the overall user days have increased. This has led to significant conflict between user groups—particularly with respect to trail use.

For the most part, All terrain vehicle users (ATVs) are not allowed on the GMNF. A “street legal” ATV and driver (an ATV registered as a motor vehicle with a licensed driver) may use Forest service roads along with town and state roads.

There are a few trails in the forest where mountain bikes are allowed. Mountain bikers would like additional trails designated for their use. Wilderness proponents want quiet trails where motorized and mechanized uses are excluded. Snowmobilers and cross-country skiers want to preserve and enhance existing trail networks within the GMNF.

Several environmentalist group representatives said that they would like the current designation of the land as an expansion area for the Mount Snow ski area eliminated from the new Forest Plan.

⁸ As noted previously, there is no baseline data re historic recreational use of the forest.

Themes from Interviews

Past Public Involvement Processes

During the interviews, each individual was asked to comment on the GMNF's past and present efforts at public outreach and involvement. Several themes were mentioned repeatedly by those interviewed.

Almost everyone interviewed applauded the Forest Service for its demonstrated commitment to involving the public in the planning process. People interviewed were particularly appreciative of the even-handedness with which the Forest Service has accepted public comment, the effort the Forest Service has made to travel to local communities to hold meetings, and of mailings that have informed them of meetings. They asked that these efforts be continued.

While many people said that they appreciated the content of the presentations made at the informational forums that were held during the fall and winter of 2001-2002, most people did not like the format of these meetings, which were held in auditoriums. A panel of experts made presentations, the audience asked questions, and then members of the public were given two minutes each to comment. Interviewees complained that these meetings became referenda for the wilderness proposal, that dialogue was very difficult in this format, and that they did not understand what, if anything, the Forest Service would do with public comments. While many of the people interviewed stated that they felt that the Forest Service facilitators did a good job in accepting public comments in an even-handed fashion, others commented that a neutral facilitator would be more appropriate than using Forest Service staff facilitators.

A number of people said that they were confused about the purpose of the "Role of the Forest" meetings, held in the winter of 2001-2002. Several participants commented that they were frustrated about being asked to discuss national forest roles that are mandated by law, and by being asked for black-and-white, yes/no responses to complex questions and issues. For example, people were asked whether or not they agreed that a particular goal was important. They felt that it would have been more useful to discuss the relative priority of a number of values. Several people asked how the results of the Role of the Forest meetings would be used. They also asked if written meeting summaries had been prepared, and how they could obtain copies.

This confusion about how particular meetings and other activities (e.g. the resource inventories and assessments described on page 8 fit into the bigger picture of the Forest Plan revision process is widespread. A number of people asked how the Forest Service intends to use public input that it receives. While they expressed appreciation of the even-handedness with which the Forest Service has received comments, they were frustrated that they did not know how these comments would be used.

Public Understanding of, and Participation in, the Forest Plan Revision Process

Public understanding of the Forest Plan revision process and opportunities for public input into the process emerged as a key issue of both interest and concern. Many of the people interviewed as part of this assessment have participated in past public outreach and involvement activities sponsored by the GMNF as part of the Forest's Plan revision process. Many of those interviewed stated that they did not know how their input in past planning activities was used.

Interviewees noted that the planning process began six years ago, and will continue for several more years. Many interviewees, including those who have participated in past forest planning activities, did not have a solid understanding of the Forest Plan revision process. They asked for clear, concise, jargon-free information about the planning process and how the Forest Service will make decisions about alternatives development and select a preferred alternative.

Active participation in the Forest Plan revision process requires a significant time commitment. The people interviewed asked that Forest Service clearly define how public input will be factored into key resource management decisions, so that individuals and organizations can make informed decisions about how much time they choose to devote to the process.

Several people said that it is frustrating to work with the Forest Service over an extended period, without receiving indications of what the Forest Service's interests are, and what the Forest Service will take into consideration in selecting an alternative. They asked for periodic updates regarding Forest Service thinking, so that the ultimate decision is not a surprise.

Many organizations with paid staff reported that they do not have the resources to attend meetings and to represent their constituents' interests over the multi-year planning process. The lay people interviewed reported even more difficulty staying involved throughout the process.

Interviewees want to participate in the forest planning process as effectively and efficiently as possible. Toward that end, they asked that the Forest Service clearly articulate the purpose of each meeting, and explain how each meeting fits into the context of the overall Forest planning process.

Some of the specific suggestions provided by those interviewed include:

- ◆ The development of overall forest goals is paramount, and that planning decisions should be based upon forest-wide goals.
- ◆ The updated forest planning process should be an information-based process. Many people suggested that stakeholder groups and area residents have a wealth of information about the forest and its use that they would like to contribute to the planning process.
- ◆ The Forest Service should continue to provide multiple ways to comment, including meetings, e-mail and written comment opportunities. While many people noted that public meetings are occasionally useful, they noted that discomfort with public speaking and the need to travel to meetings often create barriers to wide spread participation at large public meetings.
- ◆ Continue to hold meetings in locations throughout the forest that are convenient to the public.
- ◆ Use regional and local planning commissions and watershed planning groups to assist in identifying and representing the interests of people living in and near the forest.
- ◆ Provide 3 to 4 weeks' notice of meetings.
- ◆ Provide meeting notices and updates by e-mail as well as by U.S. mail.
- ◆ New individuals and organizations enter the planning process from time to time. The Forest Service make information available to "newcomers" so that everyone can readily understand the process including what key milestones and decisions have been made prior to their entry into the planning process.

Common Interests

All the people interviewed shared a deep love of, and sense of connection with, the forest. Most, if not all, of the interviewees consider the forest to be an integral part of their lives.

A number of people wanted to get out on the ground during the planning process to show others what they view as key features of the forest. For example, timber industry representatives would like to provide people with opportunities to tour mills and timber harvesting sites in the area, and Wilderness advocates would like to provide people with an opportunity to visit areas that they propose be designated as Wilderness.

The vast majority of the people interviewed actively seek opportunities to talk with people who have different perspectives than their own, and to look for ways to accommodate differing interests to the extent possible. A very few people said that there is no common ground among participants and that dialogue is "a waste of time".

Need for Increased Opportunities for Dialogue

As noted previously, almost everyone interviewed indicated that they would like increased opportunities for dialogue during the planning process. Many of those interviewed indicated that they did not feel that other participants understood their interests, and want opportunities to talk with others, explain their perspective and listen to the perspectives of others.

The interviews revealed that there is a high level of misunderstanding amongst participants in the Forest Plan revision process. Many interviewees attributed values, interests and opinions to others that were inconsistent with how the people themselves described their values, interests and opinions. In addition, many of those interviewed stated that they did not feel that other participants fully understood their perspective, and indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to explain their perspective to others.

Although most people involved in the process are very interested in increased dialogue, mistrust amongst stakeholders is quite high. Many people indicated that they were interested in talking with people with different perspectives, but that they did not know how to go about doing so.

The Role of the Forest Service in the Forest Plan Revision Process

The Forest Service plays many roles in the Forest Plan revision process. Forest Service employees act as public meeting convenors and facilitators, resource experts, and forest managers. They are also the ultimate decision-makers in the Forest Plan revision process. Because of this complexity of roles, the people interviewed expressed confusion regarding the role of the Forest Service in the Forest Plan revision process.

Most of the people interviewed said that they had a great deal of respect for the expertise of Forest Service staff, and would like the Forest Service to take more of a leadership role in the planning process. Specifically, interviewees asked that the Forest Service:

- ◆ provide information as a basis of dialogue,
- ◆ expand upon its role as educator
- ◆ set clear parameters for public discussion, including what issues are open for discussion,
- ◆ describe how public input will be used,
- ◆ describe how it will respond to public input, and
- ◆ give periodic updates regarding its thinking regarding Forest Plan revision issues.

Challenges and Recommendations

Challenge #1: Increase Public Understanding of the Forest Plan Revision Process

The interviews revealed a compelling need for clear, concise information regarding the Forest Plan revision process and opportunities for public input.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Create an overall process “roadmap” that graphically depicts the key decision points and opportunities for public involvement during the Forest Plan revision process⁹.
- ◆ Create a project glossary that defines frequently-used terms in language that is readily understandable.
- ◆ Develop a clear statement of the legal, scientific and practical constraints to the process, including the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA).
- ◆ Develop and distribute a fact sheet describing the newly revised planning regulations and their potential affect on the GMNF Forest Plan revision process.
- ◆ Create and use a listserv to distribute meeting notices and periodic (monthly or bi-monthly) status reports to interested individuals and organizations. Distribute this information by U.S. Mail to those who do not use e-mail. Update mailing lists regularly, and respect the privacy of list members.
- ◆ Make materials that summarize the statues of the process, including the “roadmap”, glossary and meeting summaries readily available to new participants.

⁹ Commentors on the draft version of this document emphasizes their need for a roadmap that clearly depicts how and when plan-related decisions will be made.

Challenge #2: Create Increased Opportunities for Dialogue

Recommendations:

- ◆ Convene a number of relatively small, regionally-based working groups whose composition reflects the full range of public interests. These groups should consist of people who are actively interested in listening to other's perspectives. The Forest Service should offer support to these groups, including information, process guidance, and facilitation. The regional groups would work with a strong land-based regional focus that provides many opportunities for small, diverse groups to build relationships and understanding, while concurrently rolling up their sleeves and reviewing maps, and getting on their hiking boots and visiting areas under discussion. As noted above, the Forest Service must provide the public with clear expectations regarding how the input of these groups will be used.
- ◆ Develop a process for synthesizing the work of the regional groups. This might involve the creation of a forest-wide working group whose purpose would be to look at "big picture" issues and coordinate and synthesize the work of the regional working groups.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for informal facilitated small-group conversations among key participants to enhance parties' mutual understanding and to explore areas of agreement and divergence, and to mediate disputes.

Challenge #3 Provide a Range of Participation Opportunities

Past and prospective participants in the revision process vary widely in the amount of time and other resources that they are able to devote to the process, as well as in their comfort in speaking at large public meetings. Some people want to be involved in the inventory and assessment phase; others are more interested in the designation of management areas.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Explore ways that participants can participate meaningfully in the inventory and assessment process. These efforts should include the dissemination of clear information about the inventory and assessment process, including the types of information that is being gathered and the ways that this information will be made available to the public. Efforts should also be made to partner with participants in the collection and analysis of information.
- ◆ Over the near term, focus public involvement on the development of forest-wide goals and provide opportunities for dialogue among participants while the inventories and assessments are being conducted.
- ◆ Once the inventories and assessments are completed, and the forest-wide goals have been developed, use what is known about a given area as a starting point in discussions about how the area might be managed in the future.
- ◆ Improve communication with local selectboards and planning commissions, interested organizations and related state agencies, through periodic Forest Service staff participation in these organizations' meetings. Selectboards and planning commissions may serve as a voice for the "average citizen" who may have an interest in the forest, but who is unlikely to travel to a large public meeting to express his or her opinion.
- ◆ Continue to provide opportunities for written comment throughout the process.

Challenge #4: Develop a Collaborative Process for Building Agreement

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) require that the Forest Service develop and consider several alternative plans before selecting a preferred alternative. This process can focus attention on the differences between parties, rather than their points of agreement. The Forest Service can maximize public collaboration by creating a process that focuses on building agreement, where possible, and documenting this agreement in a single document. Once areas of agreement are established, the alternatives required by NEPA and NFMA can be developed that use the points of agreement as a starting point, and differ only in areas in which the public has significant points of disagreement.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Design an open, collaborative process that will identify and build upon areas of agreement regarding Forest Plan revision issues.

- ◆ Reframe public involvement activities after the inventories and assessments are completed. Instead of following the traditional forest planning process model that includes a lengthy “Alternatives Development” phase that highlights differences among parties, use this time for dialogue between the Forest Service and interested parties, with the goal of finding common ground.

- ◆ Consider designing a process in which the public and the Forest Service work to develop a single proposed Forest Plan that has wide-spread support. The Forest Service staff would then be responsible for designing alternative plan proposals for consideration under NEPA., or to provide alternatives in areas where there is not considerable agreement.

Challenge # 5: Clarify the Forest Service's Role in the Forest Plan Revision Process

As noted above, interviewees asked that the Forest Service clearly articulate its role in the Forest Plan revision process, and to be leaders of the process.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Conduct a workshop for Forest Service employees to develop a common understanding of their multiple roles in the Forest Plan revision process, including their role as leaders and decision-makers, and skills-building training to support these roles.
- ◆ Provide clear, concise information to participants regarding the Forest Service's multiple roles in the Forest Plan revision process—in particular its role as decision-maker. This could be accomplished by developing a fact sheet and making it readily available to participants.

Challenge # 6: Clarify how the Forest Service will address the Wilderness Proposal and Timber Program Issues in the Forest Plan Revision Process

While the Forest Service is required to make recommendations regarding Wilderness areas within the forest as part of the Forest Plan revision process, only Congress has the authority to designate land as Wilderness. The proposal to increase the amount of Wilderness in the GMNF that the Wilderness Association presented to the Vermont congressional delegation in November 2001 has the potential to dominate the Forest Plan revision process. Clarity regarding how the Forest Service and the Vermont congressional delegation will treat the Wilderness proposal in relation to the Forest Plan revision process is needed before meaningful dialogue on this and other significant Forest Plan issues can proceed.

Recommendations:

- ◆ Provide the Vermont congressional delegation and the public with information about inventories and assessments that are currently being conducted that have bearing on the Wilderness Proposal.
- ◆ Ask the Vermont congressional delegation for a statement regarding how and when the delegation will address the Wilderness proposal, and how the delegation envisions dialogue regarding the proposal to proceed if this dialogue does not occur within the Forest Service's Forest Plan revision process.
- ◆ Hold open, public meetings to explore the interrelationship between the forest's timber harvesting program and the creation of new Wilderness areas.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for informal, facilitated small-group conversations among key participants regarding the Wilderness proposal and GMNF's timber program to identify areas of substantial agreement, and to clarify differences. These facilitated discussions should be designed to enhance parties' mutual understanding (as recommended in # 2, above), but should not replace opportunities for full public involvement in discussing these issues.

Appendix A People Interviewed

Norman Arseneault
Bob Bancroft
John Barrows
Mikael Batten
Tom Berry
Paul Brewster
Lenore Budd
Diane Burbank
Melody Burkins
Chris Casey
Tony Clark
Scott Darling
Ken Davis
Don DeHayes
Rolf Diamant
Mike Dockry
Jeff Eaton
Wallace Elton
Jennifer Esser
Jamey Fidel
Delwin Fielder
Bruce Flewelling
Joe Gagnon
Ken Gagnon
Colleen Goodrich
Ed Griffith
Jonathan Gibson
Colleen Goodrich
Tara Hamilton
Fredrick Hard
Andrew Harper
Linda Henzel
Robbo Holleran
JT Horn
Brian Keefe
Carol Knight
Leo Laferriere
Marc Lapin
Ed Larson
William Leipold

Ed Leary
Jeff LeFebvre
John Ley
Paul Karczmarczyk
Warren King
Tammy Malone
Kim Mertens
Jan Mueller
Rob McGregor
Chris McGrory Klyza
Donna Moody
John Moody
James Northup
Pam Novitzky
Rob O'Halloran
Larry Orvis
Robert Paquin
Alan Plumb
Melissa Reichert
John Roe
Ben Rose
Gary Salmon
William Sayre
Bruce Shields
Carl Spangler
John Stearns
John Sullivan
Frank Thompson
Mark Twery
Ellen Viereck
Bruce Waite
Bryant Watson
John Whitman
Jonathan Wood
Julie Wormser
Tom Yennerrell

Spoke with, but did not fully interview:
Representative David Dean
Representative Henry Holmes

Appendix B Interview Questions

Note: Each interview took a slightly different form, based upon the interests and needs of the person interviewed. The questions below served as a basis for discussion, but not all questions were asked of all interviewees.

Personal Background and Interests

Where do you live?

How long have you lived there?

What is your relationship to the GMNF?

How do activities on the GMNF affect you?

What do you consider to be the biggest challenges facing the GMNF in the next 3-5 years? Over the next 10-20 years?

What are your hopes and concerns about future uses of the GMNF?

Prior to receiving a letter from the FS about this interview, were you aware that a Forest Plan revision process was underway?

Do you feel that you have a good understanding of the USFS plan revision process?

What are your primary issues/concerns regarding the GMNF plan revision?

Public Involvement Ideas

In your opinion, what are the keys to successful public involvement?

Impressions of the FS

What impressions do you have of the agency's past efforts at involving the public in its Forest Plan revision process?

Has the FS done a good job of identifying all the stakeholder groups to participate in the planning process?

What is your understanding of how the FS will use public input regarding the plan revision?

Past Plan Process

Were you involved in past Forest Plan revision discussions?

If so, what worked and what did not work so well?

How would you like to be involved in the GMNF plan revision process?
(Attend large or small group meetings, workshops, written comments, e-mail, other)

What information or other resources do you need to participate effectively in the plan revision process?

How would you define a successful public involvement for the GMNF plan revision process?

Time available or interest in working with other key parties:

Would you be interested in participating in a one or two-day workshop on collaborative dialogue?

Over an 18-month period, how much time do you have to devote to actively participating in this plan revision?

Other related items:

Are you involved in other processes that may affect activities on the GMNF?

If so, would it be helpful to coordinate these processes? How?

Who else should I talk to about the plan revision process?

Do you have other comments or questions about the plan revision process?