

Finger Lakes National Forest
Land and Resource Management Plan
Situation Assessment

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Finger Lakes National Forest

Forest Plan Revision Process

Situation Assessment

November, 2002

Executive Summary

Each National Forest is required to develop a Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP or forest plan) to provide direction for forest management, specifies allowable uses, and broadly guides decision making on the forest. Forest plans are revised every 10 to 15 years, and the FLNF is in the midst of revising its management plan.

Given its interest in collaboration with the local community in updating its forest plan, the FLNF is working with the US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution and *Interface*, a program of the Community Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) in Chemung, Schuyler and Tompkins Counties to help develop a forest plan revision process. This report describes the results of a situation assessment conducted by the *Interface* team to recommend ways to involve the public in the plan revision process.

The *Interface* team worked with the FLNF staff to identify a comprehensive list of stakeholders who were interested in or affected by the management of the FLNF. The *Interface* team and FLNF staff interviewed more than 40 of these stakeholders, representing a wide range of perspectives, as the basis for this report.

Key findings that emerged from the interviews included:

- Perspectives about the Forest Service were mixed. Many people believed the USFS staff – particularly the current district ranger – to be friendly, accommodating, knowledgeable, accessible, and honest. Many others, however, view the Forest Service with distrust and suspicion.
- People are generally quite knowledgeable about the issues that concern them, but much less knowledgeable about the interests and concerns of other stakeholders.
- None of the interviewees appeared to understand the plan revision process well.
- Even the optimists believe any public involvement process will be difficult and frustrating but think that if stakeholders stay involved, a better plan will result.

Based on the *Interface* team's analysis of the interview results, a number of challenges were identified that the USFS will have to navigate to have a successful public involvement process:

- The relationship between the community and the USFS will be of paramount importance.
- The USFS and the community surrounding the FLNF define important management concerns differently – in ways that only partially overlap.
- Although some people interviewed were fully supportive of multiple use management, including resource extraction, a sizable number had concerns and desires not completely

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Compatible with the USFS's multiple use mandate. They would like the forest to be protected from the disturbance caused by resource extraction to protect other benefits.

- A number of people interviewed claimed that much of the disagreement about how to manage the FLNF was caused by a lack of understanding of science. But value-based conflicts are also very important. Delineating the role that science can and cannot play in management decisions will help to improve any public involvement process.
- There are a number of terms that have different meanings for people and therefore cause problems of understanding.
- Perspectives on ownership of the forest differ. The USFS views the forest as the property of the entire nation. Many members of the local community see the forest as a unique part of the local environment and think the forest belongs to them.
- The most controversial management issues in the FLNF have been exacerbated by the tendency for people with various perspectives on these issues to view those who disagree with them in extreme and simplistic ways.
- Currently, a lack of trust exists between members of the community and the USFS and between members of the community with opposing interests.
- Many FLNF stakeholders either do or can make use of unilateral strategies to help obtain their objectives. This will create obstacles to developing the kind of working relationships needed to address the spectrum of issues.

While the challenges the public involvement process presents are significant, there is also reason to expect that these challenges can be met. The USFS can increase the likelihood of navigating these challenges by:

- making USFS operations transparent;
- building a common body of knowledge among stakeholders interested in the FLNF;
- designing a public involvement process that is fair and perceived as fair; and
- producing accessible reports and information.

The report proposes a public involvement process that is based on the information learned from this assessment. The key elements of our recommended approach are:

- Initial workshop(s) to lay the groundwork for the public involvement process.
- Visioning session(s) to articulate collaboratively developed goals and desired future conditions for the forest.
- A series of large meetings to discuss issues identified in the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan and the inventory and assessment process.
- Articulation of standards and guidelines for the whole forest and particular management areas by the Forest Service.
- Heterogeneous groups of stakeholders develop maps specifying the amount and location of different management areas. Each group delineates the pros and cons of their map.
- Maps gathered and discussed with the public, culminating in the USFS developing several forest plans based on the maps and public input on them. Formal comment period begins.

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Introduction

Nestled in the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York, the Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) consists of 16,000 acres of pasture, brush, and forest situated in Schuyler and Seneca Counties. Most of the forest was formerly farmland. Located in a region of rolling hills, farms, vineyards, orchards, and forests, the FLNF provides a wide variety of uses to the people of the area, including recreation, hunting, grazing, timber harvesting, and spiritual and physical rejuvenation.

The FLNF is one of the smallest National Forests in the United States. Like all National Forests, it is federally owned land administered by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) – an agency of the Department of Agriculture. As such, the FLNF is managed according to national mandates that guide the operations of the USFS. These mandates include:

- providing multiple uses in an environmentally sound manner, including use of natural resources, recreation, plant and animal diversity, water quality and supply, and less tangible values, such as aesthetics;
- consideration of the economic and environmental aspects of resource management; and
- encouraging early and frequent public participation in the design and implementation of management plans.

Finger Lakes National Forest Administration

In 1954 the decision was made to transfer administrative responsibilities for federal land parcels in the Finger Lakes area to the Forest Service. Due to the small number of acres, it was impossible to establish a workforce with a wide range of expertise normally found on a National Forest; therefore, administration was given to the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. The Vermont administrative location is comprised of a full workforce of employees with responsibilities for the management of the Finger Lakes National Forest. These employees, who routinely work on the FLNF, include wildlife biologists, archeologists, hydrologists, foresters, recreation specialists, engineers, and soil scientists. The Forest Service office in Hector, New York has approximately five full-time employees, including a District Ranger, trails and campgrounds manager, forester and range manager, a forest planner, and an office administrator. Seasonal workers also supplement the Hector workforce. The top administrator, the Forest Supervisor for the Green Mountain and Finger Lakes National Forest is located in the Supervisors Office in Rutland, Vermont.

The Land and Resource Management Plan

Each National Forest is required to develop a Land and Resource Management Plan (LRMP, or forest plan) – a document that provides a direction for forest management, specifies allowable uses, and broadly guides decision making on the forest. The FLNF plan was created to manage the forest to: provide opportunities to observe and enjoy

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nature; provide opportunities to roam around in a large unrestricted area; produce wood forage and other products like high quality recreation, diverse wildlife habitat and rare plants without destroying long-term productivity; demonstrate multiple use management; educate and promote an awareness of natural resource management and a strong conservation ethic; and provide benefits not found on private lands. Forest plans are revised every 10 to 15 years and the FLNF is in the midst of revising its management plan.

The forest plan revision process began in 1996 when the FLNF held a series of meetings to identify interests and concerns related to forest management. The process was interrupted in 1998 when the U.S. Congress suspended planning activities on all National Forests in order to revise the national rules guiding planning. Plan revision on the FLNF resumed again in 2001 when Congressional authorization was restored. The target date for completing a new forest management plan is 2004.

The plan revision goals as articulated by the FLNF administration are:

- an improved information base for decision making;
- an updated, improved forest plan, which provides for healthy ecosystems and sustainable management practices by using the best science and techniques practicable; and
- improved techniques and more efficient implementation of monitoring and evaluation.

Given its interest in collaboration with the local community in updating its forest plan, the FLNF contacted the US Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution. The US Institute was created to help parties in resolving environmental conflicts that involve federal agencies or interests in a timely and constructive manner through assisted negotiation and mediation. The US Institute selected *Interface* from its National Roster of Environmental Dispute Resolution and Consensus Building Professionals to work with the FLNF to conduct a situation assessment, offer guidance on an appropriate approach for encouraging collaboration, and assist with facilitation of key Forest Plan meetings. *Interface* is a program of the Community Dispute Resolution Center (CDRC) in Chemung, Schuyler and Tompkins Counties. The role of *Interface* is to serve as an independent advisor and make recommendations about how to best involve the public. This report describes the results of a situation assessment conducted by Judy Saul, Harriet London, Camille Tischler and Bruce Lauber, the *Interface* team.

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Situation Assessment Process

A situation assessment involves gathering information to help guide some future decision or activity. In this case, information was gathered to help develop recommendations about how the FLNF could involve the public in forest plan revision. The *Interface* team worked with the FLNF staff to identify a comprehensive list of stakeholders who were interested in or affected by the management of the FLNF – these stakeholders included private citizens, local government representatives, business leaders, and citizens’ groups. It is generally impossible to include all affected stakeholders in a situation assessment. Instead, an attempt was made to identify a broad range of stakeholders with a diverse range of opinions. Therefore, although this sample should capture the full range of perspectives on the management of the FLNF, it should not be interpreted to be representative of the community as a whole. The opinions expressed here can not be extrapolated as those of a majority of community members. The assessment team believes that understanding the full spectrum of perspectives is critical to the design of a public involvement process that treats all interests fairly.

More than 40 stakeholders were interviewed either by FLNF staff or by *Interface*. Interviews lasted up to two hours and covered a broad range of topics, including interests and concerns related to the FLNF, opinions about how the FLNF should be managed, and beliefs about how to involve the public fairly during the plan revision process. Some interviews were done in groups, some individually, some in person and others on the telephone. Information collected during interviews conducted by *Interface* was treated as confidential, that is, comments made by those interviewed are not attributed to specific individuals or organizations in either discussions with others or in written reports. (The interview questionnaire is included as Appendix A.)

Key Findings

In this section, we summarize those perspectives and opinions that are most relevant to the design of the public involvement process. (For a fuller summary of the information collected during the interviews see Appendix B.) This summary presents the opinions of people interviewed and the facts they believe to be true about the FLNF. *No claim is made about the accuracy or the veracity of their beliefs.* Indeed, in some cases people held contradictory or incompatible beliefs about the FLNF. However, perception and belief form the basis of one’s opinions and are therefore important considerations in the design of meaningful public involvement.

These key findings fall under four major headings: the relationship between the community and the Forest Service, understanding of other stakeholders, understanding of the forest plan revision process, and the likelihood of success of public involvement.

Relationship between the Community and the Forest Service

Perspectives about the Forest Service were mixed. Many people believed the USFS staff to be friendly, accommodating, knowledgeable, accessible, and honest. Specific mention was made of the following:

- The public meetings organized by the FLNF staff and facilitated by the Cornell Program on Environment and Community were very productive. They improved both understanding of the issues and the relationships between the FLNF staff and the participants.
- The current district ranger's work was singled out by a number of those interviewed. They remarked on her knowledge and her competence, the time she took to get to know people and her willingness to listen and to consider their interests. They said that a personal connection with a responsive forest staff person made a big difference. They regretted that at times she was put in the position of "taking the heat" for problems they felt were caused by the FLNF administration.

At the same time, however, others interviewed view the Forest Service with distrust and suspicion. Concerns about the Forest Service tended to focus on several common themes:

- The USFS staff are not seen as involved and visible in the community – they are not seen at local events and the perception is that they have little feeling for the people who live in the area. Some interviewees also think that the USFS does not consider how its actions may negatively affect the community. *These concerns are exacerbated by the perception that the key USFS decision makers live and work in Vermont.*
- Forest Service operations are not "transparent" – many of those interviewed do not understand what the Forest Service does or how it does it. Terminology used by the USFS is inaccessible and confusing. Information provided in response to questions is often irrelevant. Those interviewed claim that the public has no idea how their input will be used in decision-making. It is unclear where the USFS staff gets its information about the FLNF to make decisions. Meetings are not advertised in an effective and timely way – often they are held at inopportune times or conflict with other important community events.
- Concerns surfaced about perceived USFS biases. Some interviewees believe the USFS does not treat all FLNF users fairly and equally. They viewed the USFS as selective in how it interprets its management policies and enforces its rules. USFS documents – such as the recently published *Fifteen Year Retrospective* – were perceived as containing factual errors and as designed to present material in a manner favorable to USFS's agenda.

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- Some stakeholders, e.g., volunteers, meeting participants and community activists, have spent many unpaid hours working on FLNF issues. They are concerned about whether and how this past work will be used. To them the USFS seems to want to begin the process again as if this past work did not occur. Some interviewees commented that the process is so lengthy that citizens get worn out.

Understanding of Other Stakeholders

Those interviewed are generally quite knowledgeable about the issues that concern them, but much less knowledgeable about the interests, concerns, and perspectives of other stakeholders. Some people tend to portray the perspectives of those who disagree with them simplistically, suggesting that their opponents are unrealistic, greedy, or ignorant. Others are very aware of the need to understand the needs and concerns of the members of the communities around the forest and mentioned the desire to have meetings where community members could have a dialogue and begin to understand their differences.

Understanding of the Forest Plan Revision Process

None of the interviewees appeared to understand the plan revision process well. Although most understood the reasons to have a plan and the reasons to revise it, they did not understand the process for developing a new plan. This finding held true even for people who had read USFS documents related to plan revision, attended public meetings, and worked closely with the FLNF staff in the past.

Beliefs about the Likelihood of Success of Public Involvement

Some people interviewed are optimistic about the prospects of a successful public involvement process, and others are skeptical. However, for all the reasons discussed in this report, even the optimists believe the process will be difficult and frustrating but think that if stakeholders stay involved and work together, a better plan will be produced. The skeptics believe that the people on opposing sides of key issues favor unilateral strategies for obtaining their objectives and are unlikely to try to reach understanding or agreement with others.

Analysis of Factors Affecting Public Involvement

Successful public involvement during revision of the FLNF plan will require the USFS to navigate a variety of challenges. The most obvious stakeholder concerns, raised repeatedly during interviews, have been outlined above in the “Key Findings” section. Of these, the relationship between the community and the USFS will be of paramount importance. The forest is important to the economic, physical and spiritual well being of many people who live in the area. In the absence of a good working relationship with the USFS people will, understandably, look for other ways of getting their needs met which will in turn frustrate efforts to implement a forest plan and will also increase acrimony in the area. On the other hand a good working relationship between the FLNF staff and the community could result in many positive benefits.

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The Interface team listened to stakeholders, compiled and reviewed the data and ascertained the themes that ran through the interviews as delineated in the key findings section of this report. Other challenges became apparent when we compared and contrasted the positions on the issues held by the people interviewed. Based on this analysis, we have identified below the major issues that the USFS and the public will confront during plan revision.

Clash of Cultures

The USFS has a clear mission, national legislative mandates, and a deeply rooted organizational culture. Because of this USFS staff view the FLNF as a National Forest that happens to be located in the Finger Lakes region. Consequently, they tend to define management issues in the FLNF in terms similar to how issues are defined on other National Forests – how to manage timber; how to balance different recreational uses; whether to lease for resource extraction, etc.

Many of those interviewed, however, have a very different perspective. They view the FLNF as a unique and treasured local resource that happens to be a National Forest. Consequently, important management concerns may be defined differently and overlap only partially with the management concerns identified by the USFS. The most important community benefits sought from the FLNF include physical and spiritual rejuvenation, contributions to a healthy ecosystem, direct economic needs (e.g., grazing), and less well-documented economic needs (e.g., an attraction for local tourism).

Based on the interviews, the USFS and the surrounding community have incomplete understandings of each other. Although both the USFS and community members share common interests and have made efforts to bridge their gaps, *a lack of clarity continues to exist about which interests they share and what their key differences really are*. Public involvement will need to address this lack of clarity if it is to be successful.

National Forest versus Ideal Vision

Although some people interviewed were fully supportive of multiple use management in the FLNF, including resource extraction, a sizable number had concerns and desires that were not completely compatible with the USFS's multiple use mandate. In particular, they would like the forest to be protected from the disturbance caused by resource extraction in order to protect other benefits.

- Some used the words “national park” to describe their preference, focusing on the recreational benefits the forest provides.
- Others would prefer that the FLNF be treated more like a wilderness – left as untouched as possible by human activity. They support recreational use but only those types of recreation that are the least invasive. They oppose recreational activities that they see as harmful to the healthy growth and development of the forest and its wildlife, and they oppose most resource extraction.

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- Other people interviewed did not oppose resource extraction in principle but feel that the FLNF is too small a forest to absorb its impacts. They think, therefore, that foregoing resource extraction in the FLNF is the wisest choice.
- Still another group sees the FLNF as an opportunity to allow people a place to be educated about the natural world. They have two kinds of education in mind. Some would like the FLNF to offer the opportunity to learn about ecology, with interpretive signs that inform people about forest cycles, typical plants and wildlife, etc. A second kind of education comes from just being in the forest and experiencing nature. People advocating this kind of education believe it is essential to environmental awareness.

Science as a Solution

A number of people interviewed claimed that much of the disagreement about how to manage the FLNF was caused by a lack of understanding of science. Based on this perception, some people argued that experts should make decisions about the management issues; experts understand the science and so they are in the position to make the best decision. Others thought that the science could and should be explained to people and that doing so would better enable them to make wise choices.

In conflicts involving the natural environment, however, an understanding of the science of the issues involved often does not address the source of the conflict. Value-based choices – decisions about what we believe is right or best – are integral to forest management. In the FLNF, many difficult decisions involve such choices. Are the benefits of gas leasing worth even a small amount of risk to the forest ecosystem? Is an unmanaged forest preferable to an actively managed forest? Such questions have strong value components. Science can inform them, but not answer them. Delineating the role that science can and can not play in management decisions will help to improve public involvement processes.

Stewardship Has Many Meanings

There are a number of terms that have different meanings for people and therefore cause problems of understanding. These include: preservation, primitive conditions, conservation, management by objectives, and stewardship. There seems to be the most disagreement among those interviewed about the definition of stewardship.

Stewardship to some means protecting the forest and its inhabitants from human intrusion. They perceive present day human activity as destructive to the environment and believe that there must be some places that are protected from it. Given this sense of the definition, the objectives of the USFS, to their mind, are in contradiction to the USFS's mission to be stewards of the land. Managing the forest for resource extraction and economic gain is, in their view, a violation of the public trust.

For other members of the public and for the USFS, stewardship means protecting the long-term productivity of the land, but doing so, at least in part, so that the land can

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provide benefits to people. According to this view, active human management of the forest is not only acceptable, but often necessary to protect and improve the land.

Differences in how terms such as stewardship are used can interfere with dialogue and understanding during the plan revision process.

Ownership and Financial Benefits

Ownership of the forest, the financial benefits of the forest, and to whom these benefits accrue, are interrelated concerns. The USFS views the forest as the property of the nation. The USFS oversees National Forests and has a mandate to provide goods and services – both tangible and intangible – to the nation. The commodities produced and the revenue that goes to the Federal Government is seen as a contribution to the national welfare.

Many members of the local community believe that as citizens and taxpayers of the U.S., the forest belongs to them. The perception is that local people get little revenue from the FLNF but they end up paying for it in indirect ways (e.g., because the forest is public land it is exempt from property taxes). Thus, local people pay higher taxes to provide public services (roads, law enforcement, etc.) for the forest. Tourist revenues may conceivably compensate for these costs, but information about whether they actually do is not available. Thus, local residents see themselves as paying the costs of public services and of intrusion into their lives with the benefits going to Washington, D.C.

Concerns about ownership and the costs and benefits of the FLNF will likely play a prominent role during plan revision.

Stereotyping Other Stakeholders

The most contentious management issues focus on extraction of forest resources (primarily gas and timber) – whether to extract them at all and, if so, under what conditions. Such decisions are difficult under the best of circumstances, but they have been exacerbated in the FLNF by the tendency for some people on both sides of these issues to view each other in extreme and simplistic ways. People adamantly opposed to resource extraction are characterized as unrealistic (resources have to come from somewhere), emotional (overly sentimental about the natural world), or elitist (only the rich can afford an undisturbed forest). People adamantly in favor of resource extraction are stereotyped as callous (no concern about nature) or selfish (money grubbing). People on all sides tend to think that the others are ill-informed and do not really understand what is at stake. Most are reluctant to acknowledge the merit in others' arguments. This reluctance is a major barrier to meaningful public involvement. Making progress on the issues requires honest and open communication – a willingness to share beliefs and ideas AND a willingness to listen to others. Such communication will be difficult to achieve if respect does not replace derision.

Lack of Trust

Currently, a lack of trust exists between members of the community and the USFS and between members of the community with opposing interests. The distrust between the USFS and the community has many causes, but it is exacerbated by the lack of “transparency” in USFS operations. With little understanding of how the USFS makes decisions and takes actions, difficulties encountered breed suspicion. For example, problems in publicizing and scheduling meetings, the length of the plan revision process, and the energy needed to sustain involvement in FLNF affairs combine to generate suspicion about whether the USFS is truly interested in public participation.

Perceptions about money also contribute to mistrust. The public sees the USFS spending money on consultants, and they assume this is money that would otherwise be spent on forest improvements. Some FS staff are concerned that some citizens’ groups are getting money from national organizations and therefore have an advantage over other groups.

Mistrust among community groups comes partially from isolation and lack of knowledge of each other. The tendency of some groups to be assertive and adamant and others to be silent but angry about important issues can also generate misunderstanding, bad feelings, and mistrust.

Unilateral Strategies

Many FLNF stakeholders either do or can make use of unilateral strategies to help obtain their objectives – they can adopt methods to obtain their desires without considering the impact on others. The pursuit of unilateral strategies interferes with collaboration. Since the USFS is required to make the final decision about plan revision, some of those interviewed fear that all the time and energy they invest in plan revision could go for naught. Other attempts at unilateral strategies are evident. Preservationists have a bill in Congress, which would permanently ban gas leasing in the FLNF. ATV users are working independently of the volunteer committee that discusses trail use with the USFS.

There are important reasons why groups choose to adopt unilateral strategies. As long as such strategies are perceived as viable alternatives to collaboration, however, they will create obstacles to developing the kind of working relationships needed to address the entire spectrum of forest management issues.

Creating a Good Public Involvement Process

While the challenges the public process presents are significant, there is also reason to expect that these challenges can be met. The reasons are:

- The long-term health of the forest is a desire of everyone. Whether it is viewed primarily as an economic resource or a spiritual resource, its health is paramount. Everyone we talked with has a particular interest (e.g. timber, trails, etc.) and a general interest in the health of the forest. There is good reason to believe that the stakeholders will be able to view their particular interests within the larger picture of forest health.

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- The values of honesty, promise keeping and reciprocity are important both to the members of the community and to the USFS
- Those interviewed had a number of specific ideas about how to design a fair public process. These ideas follow.

Components of a Good Public Process

When people were asked what they hoped to see in a good public involvement process they addressed five general areas. These areas are described in more detail in Appendix B, but summarized here.

- The USFS needs to work to improve its community relations. FLNF staff should take part in community affairs as much as possible and seek a final decision that will unite the community – not divide it.
- The USFS should provide process information to interested stakeholders. People need to be kept informed about the stage of the planning process, what decisions are being made, and what opportunities to participate exist.
- Education will be needed to increase understanding of the process – specifically education about: the interests of different stakeholders; cultural differences between long time residents and newcomers; the importance of a forest management plan; and forest issues.
- The USFS should seek creative ways to publicize public events in the plan revision process and develop strategies to increase attendance at those events.
- The fairness of the process can be increased by: articulating the criteria that will be used to guide participation and make decisions; disclosing the biases and conflicts of interest of the USFS and interested stakeholders; making correspondence and communication about plan revision available to all; and writing documents so that the public can understand them.
- Develop strategies for ongoing public involvement in forest management after plan revision is complete.

Our Recommendations

The Forest Plan revision process provides a unique opportunity for the USFS and the community to establish a shared understanding and a constructive working relationship. Relationships built during the revision process will also influence the implementation of the plan.

Goals

The FLNF administration's goals for the public involvement process are:

- A collective vision for the role of the National Forests in New York.
- Strong partnerships and collaborative relationships between the Forest Service, the public, and other land management agencies.
- Improved techniques for the stakeholders to work together and to resolve conflicts when they arise.
- Improved implementation of the forest plan.

In order to obtain these goals, the challenges described in this report must be successfully navigated. Taking the following steps will help to navigate them.

Make USFS Operations Transparent

Numerous concerns were expressed during the interviews about key FLNF decisions being made by faceless USFS decision makers located in Vermont. For public confidence to be built in the plan revision process, local stakeholders need the opportunity to develop relationships with the USFS staff who will ultimately make the decision about which forest plan is adopted – much as they have developed relationships with the USFS staff located in Hector.

Consequently, USFS decision makers must play a prominent role in the public involvement process. They must not only be present but willing to engage in open and honest communication with the public – sharing their views, describing how the process has challenged their thinking, discussing the dilemmas they face, and speculating about how they could address the dilemmas.

The USFS must be as clear as possible about what parameters constrain them as they develop the forest plan. In other words, the USFS must explain how much latitude they have to tailor the forest plan to the wishes of the community.

The forest plan is organized in terms of goals and objectives, but the public is not only concerned about the goals and objectives. The strategies and practices used to reach them are also important. These strategies and practices associated with the goals and objectives need to be clear so that the public understands the implications of the plan.

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Both the process that will be used to develop the forest plan and the criteria used to choose elements of the plan must be made explicit. Making these points explicit will require frequent repetition throughout the public involvement process.

Build a Common Body of Knowledge

Disputes about the accuracy and reliability of other people's knowledge are widespread in relation to the FLNF. Disagreements exist about both facts and the appropriate values to guide FLNF management. To address this challenge, the USFS should encourage differences in perspectives to be articulated respectfully during the public involvement process. With a clear understanding of differences, the community and USFS can attempt to build a common body of knowledge that can be used during the plan revision process. This common body of knowledge will primarily be built by creating meetings to explore different views on specific issues – meetings that are focused, safe, well-run, and with a truly neutral facilitator.

Design a Process that is Fair and Perceived as Fair

A public involvement process that is perceived as fair is critical to the acceptance of the final forest plan. The fairness of the process can be enhanced by some of the steps above, but one of the points that deserves special attention is the facilitation of events.

USFS staff will be the primary facilitators of the public involvement process. Neutral facilitators would be preferable, but that option is not possible given budget constraints. Steps can be taken to mitigate this problem, however. They are:

- The USFS could help committed community members receive facilitator training.
- These community members could participate as rotating facilitators of meetings.
- Facilitators should never give content information. That is, no matter who the facilitator is at a particular meeting, they should never play the role of both expert and facilitator. Meeting agendas should be planned so that the necessary experts do not also have to serve as facilitators.
- USFS staff members serving as facilitators should not also represent the USFS' interests during a public meeting. If the USFS perspective needs to be represented at the meeting, another member of the USFS should be present to play this role.
- The facilitator should not take notes. Another person should be assigned to capture, type, and/or approve and distribute the information given by participants during the meeting.

Produce Accessible Reports and Information

Reports and information need to be carefully designed to be accessible to the public. Specific steps that can be taken to achieve this include:

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- Clear, simple written information on relevant issues (e.g. on timber harvesting) needs to be available before and at meetings.
- Notes from meetings need to be recorded clearly and accurately and available as soon as possible after the meetings.
- Information used during the process needs to be clearly relevant to the local area or to have its relevance to local area articulated.
- Summarized information needs to be made available, helping people understand how all the parts interrelate and affect the whole.
- Non-experts should review reports to ensure that language is clear and accessible.

Designs for the Public Involvement Process

In addition to articulating the general guidelines above, we developed several alternative approaches to public involvement for consideration.

Initial Workshop(s)

All approaches would be preceded by one or more workshops that would:

- present an overview and timetable of the process;
- present USFS criteria for making a decision about a forest plan;
- refine details of the process; and
- provide training in and/or education about facilitation.

Each design would also include certain common elements. The most important of these elements is that *each process would be facilitated*. Other common elements would be:

- Excellent publicity, with every opportunity used to get the word out (See Appendix B for some suggestions.)
- The opportunity for people to speak and say what they need and want.
- The opportunity for people to listen to each other in the most constructive ways possible.
- Preparation and distribution of information on critical forest issues.
- The opportunity for people to synthesize complex information and divergent perspectives.
- A variety of venues or ways for people to participate in the process.

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- Articulation of the goals of the LRMP process and the criteria the USFS will use to make decisions.
- A coherent design for the entire process articulated ahead of time so that the public can understand what will occur and how it relates to the goal.

The Design

The elements of the design include:

- A visioning session(s) to arrive at collaboratively developed goals and desired future conditions for the forest – with the understanding that the USFS will use this information to develop three or four alternative plans.
- Several large meetings to discuss the issues identified in the Notice of Intent to revise the Forest Plan.
- Two or more large meetings about the inventory and assessment process including an overview of the information acquired through the inventory and assessment work, a display of the written material produced and information on how to access the materials after the meeting.
- Several meetings to directly address problems/concerns that emerge as the inventory and assessment information is understood and absorbed.
- The USFS will clarify the standards and guidelines, for the whole forest and for particular management areas, under which they operate. They also will outline the different management areas (e.g., timber management, trail usage, special area, etc.) that will be used in the revised forest plan.
- At this point, heterogeneous small groups will be formed. Each will be assigned the task of developing a map that would specify the amount and location of different management areas. Each group will delineate the pros and cons of their map, based on the issues raised in earlier steps of the process. These small groups will need clear direction, a reasonable time frame, and good facilitation. Individuals or groups unable to attend meetings will have the option of creating their own maps for submission.
- The USFS will gather all maps and, at one or more large meetings, will discuss with the public the similarities and differences in the publics' maps.
- As a result of the maps gathered and the input received, the USFS will then develop several forest plans with corresponding analysis (EIS), designating one as preferred. This will mark the beginning of the formal comment period.
- Formal comments will be received by the Forest Service on the Draft Forest Plan and Draft EIS.

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- The Forest Supervisor will then make a decision on a final Forest Plan and will publish Record of Decision along with a Final EIS and Final Forest Plan. A formal appeal period follows this step.
- Finally, the new Forest Plan will be implemented and project specific analysis will be started.

We recommend this process design for several reasons:

- This design will give the public a substantial role in developing the new forest plan. Interested people will have the opportunity to offer input repeatedly throughout the process – contributing both to the design and the selection of a forest plan.
- This approach will promote clear communication by the USFS about its constraints and its preferences. The USFS will publicize: the standards and guidelines under which it operates; the range of plans it is willing to consider; and the particular forest plan it prefers.
- Potential conflicts over scientific information are anticipated, and the opportunity to address them is provided. The USFS will openly share scientific information it gathers during the inventory and assessment process. The design includes the opportunity for the public to question and challenge this information.
- Perhaps most importantly, this design will help to establish and strengthen relationships between those interested in the management of the forest. People who want to help shape the future of the forest will have to participate in the public involvement process. Tasks throughout the public involvement process (e.g., articulating a collective vision for the forest, delineating management areas, etc.) will require people to work collaboratively. This collaborative work will give people the opportunity to understand others more fully and will help to break down the negative stereotypes and misperceptions that we noted during the situation analysis. The improved relationships will not only contribute to the revised plan, but will lay the groundwork for addressing future conflicts.

We expect that this approach to public involvement will result in a forest plan that is both more responsive to the local community and technically more sound.

Appendix A: Interview Guides:

Interface Team

Forest Service Staff

Interview Guide
Finger Lakes National Forest Plan Revision

Introductory Points

- FLNF is revising its land use management plan
- FLNF will be seeking public input throughout that process
- Forest Service will choose final management plan based on:
 - National legislative mandates
 - Public input
 - Constraints on resources available
- We are at an early step in the process
 - Other opportunities for input later in the process
- We are collecting input from people interested in management of the FLNF
 - Their interests and concerns about FLNF
 - Their understanding of what is at issue in the FLNF
 - Their beliefs about how to make public involvement most effective
- Trying to collect information that will help in design of fair process for involving public
- Your input will help us to understand the issue better and contribute to process design
- Confidentiality – statements you make:
 - Will not be seen by anyone besides Interface and Forest Service staff
 - Will not be attributed to you specifically unless we ask your permission first
 - Summaries of comments from all interviews WILL be made available in report

Interests and Concerns

(1) What are your interests in the FLNF?

(2) What do you think are the most important management decisions facing the FLNF today?

(3) What decisions do you think should be made with regard to . . . [decision(s) identified in previous answer]? If you were trying to convince someone else that these were the best decisions for the FLNF, what reasons would you offer?

Process Questions

(5) How well do you feel you understand the FLNF plan revision process? What information would help you understand the process better?

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(6) Because some people disagree strongly about how the FLNF should be managed, it is challenging to take all their perspectives into consideration during revision of the land use management plan. Furthermore, the Forest Service will consider not only public input, but national legislative mandates and constraints on resources available when designing the new plan. Given all these constraints, what do you think is a fair way for the FLNF to involve people with different perspectives in the plan revision process?

(7) How easy do you think it would be to work with the FLNF staff? How much have you worked with the FLNF staff in the past?

(8) How easy do you think it would be for you to work with other citizens who are interested in the management of the FLNF – even if their interests are different from your own? How much have you worked with other citizens interested in the FLNF in the past?

(9) If you had your choice, in what ways would you like to be involved in forest plan revision?

Wrap Up Questions

(10) What other things do you think it's important for me to know about the FLNF?

(11) What other people do you think we need to make sure are involved in the forest plan revision process?

(12) If you could manage the FLNF any way you wanted – if money were no object and you didn't have to worry about federal laws and regulations – what would the FLNF be like 50 years from today

Forest Service Staff Interview Guide
Finger Lakes National Forest Plan Revision

Questions

- (1) What do you think are the most important management decisions facing the FLNF today?
- (2) What decisions do you think should be made with regard to . . . [the issues identified]? If you were trying to convince someone else that these were the best decisions for the FLNF, what reasons would you offer?
- (3) What decisions do you think the public wants made on the issues you identified, [e.g. oil and gas, timber management, etc] ?
- (4) Given the situation – that there are multiple perspectives on how the forest should be managed and that the FS has specific mandates as well as budget constraints - what do you think is a fair way for the FLNF to involve people with different perspectives in the plan revision process?
- (5) What ideas do you have for creating a process for public involvement that is fair and involves people with different perspectives?
- (6) What challenges do you see ahead as we involve the public in the plan revision process?
- (7) How easy do you think it will be for you to work with the citizens who are interested in the management of the FLNF?
- (8) What other things do you think it's important for us to know about the FLNF?
- (9) What conditions led to the FS decision to hire consultant to assist in the planning and implementing of the next phase of public involvement?

Appendix B: Major Issues

Major Issues

This appendix contains a more complete summary of the information collected during the interviews. Stakeholders were interviewed about their interests and concerns, what they believed were important issues in the FLNF, what decisions they believed should be made with regard to the FLNF, and how they thought a fair process should be structured for involving the public in forest plan revision. No claim is made about the accuracy or the veracity of these comments.

The summary information is divided into two parts: 1) a summary of the major issues; and 2) ideas for a good public process.

Summary of Major Issues

In the course of our assessment the following issues were raised. Issues are in alphabetical order.

ATV Use

The only clear support for ATV use came from ATV users, and they provided a variety of arguments for ATV use:

- ATV users have a real interest in preserving the natural beauty that is the forest.
- The provision of legal trails would help keep ATV users off the more sensitive areas of the forest.
- They want new trails that others do not use.
- For many less physically able users, ATVs represent their only means of getting out on the forest.
- ATV users could help with trail maintenance (their tires help smooth out horse holes).
- ATV users would be another type of tourist drawn to the area.
- Many ATV users are trained in first aid and CPR and carry first aid kits on their ATVs.
- ATV trails make good fire access roads, a good dual purpose use.
- The FLNF is a National Forest and everyone should be able to use it.

Most of those interviewed were firmly against allowing ATV access in the forest. Some were uncertain how to reconcile barring ATV use with the fact that ATV users are taxpayers, too. Concerns expressed included:

- ATVs are noisy and polluting.
- ATVs cause negative impacts on wildlife and wildlife habitat.
- ATVs increase wear and tear on trails.
- ATV users could not be confined to particular trails.
- ATVs cause soil compaction and root damage to plants and trees.
- ATVs would interfere with the FLNF as a place where people can experience nature and with other recreational uses of the forest.

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- ATV users are anti-social and lacking in respect for the law. ATV users trespass on private property (sometimes ruining crops), travel illegally on highways, allow children to operate ATVs, and ride in the FLNF even though access is prohibited. ATV users are also unwilling to work with others.
- ATV licenses are so small that it is nearly impossible to identify those who transgress.

Education

Several important educational needs were expressed in relation to the FLNF:

- The FLNF is a valuable place to educate children and adults about nature. There are several programs that use the forest as an educational site.
- A need exists for education about the USFS, its mission, and its goals. People do not know what the USFS does, and they do not know the difference between a National Park and a National Forest.
- A need exists for education about both the environmental and economic aspects of forests and woodlands.

Grazing

The Hector Grazing Association has a long history of involvement with the FLNF. The association managed the forest for 50 years and during that time planted over a million trees. Grazing is important to the producers but it is also important for the tourist industry (people like to see animals in a pasture), it keeps land open (without grazing it would revert to brush), and it keeps land on the tax rolls. There are several problems with using the FLNF for grazing:

- No one at the USFS understands cattle grazing.
- Some USFS management practices interfere with grazing (e.g., requiring bird habitat that is incompatible with grazing).
- The USFS does not making decisions in a timely way (e.g. for the repair and maintenance of ponds that are essential to the well being of the livestock).
- New ponds are needed, but the money that was allocated for them was lost.
- Techniques used for monitoring pond water quality are outdated.
- Fees charged are inappropriate for local farmers because many of them can't afford to graze on FLNF lands.

Land Acquisition

The USFS is interested in expanding the forest by continuing to acquire lands in the area. Acquisition presents a problem for the local communities because it takes the property off the tax rolls. The USFS is aware of the problem and its need to provide the communities with compensation.

Oil and Gas Leasing

A range of opinions exists on the question of oil and gas leasing in the FLNF. People who support it believe that the environmental impact on the forest will be minimal or non-existent if the rules are followed. They also believe that the USFS will see to it that

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the environment is safeguarded. They believe extracting the resources will generate revenue for the community and the FLNF, fulfill the FLNF's the multi-use mandate, and contribute to the stability of energy supplies in the nation.

People against oil/gas extraction believe that the environmental impact on the forest will be too great. They believe that the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prepared on gas leasing was flawed and that the USFS failed to respond to inquiries about the flaws. They also believe that public opinion on the question is clear and that the public does not support leasing. While the financial aspects of oil/gas leasing are not their primary concern, they think that the financial benefits will accrue to very few people but everyone will pay the cost.

People with different perspectives read the gas leasing EIS. There was widespread agreement that the report was written in inaccessible language (“lawyer language”) and that the inaccessible language was a barrier both to understanding and to a spirit of cooperation. In addition, they thought much of the EIS was not specific to the FLNF and that it probably was overpriced. More than one person said that it appeared to be written by people who had never been to upstate New York.

Some people are not against gas leasing in principle but are against it in the FLNF for the following reasons:

- Many people in the region lease their lands for oil and gas. There is much evidence that most companies are unethical both in their environmental practices and in the compensation they pay to the landowner.
- The top price for the rights to the FLNF is \$1.87 an acre. Neighbors have been able to get as much as \$35 an acre, but mostly they get \$20. New York State gets as much as \$200 an acre. Even at that price the profits made by the companies is astronomical. We can rethink oil and gas leasing when they want to pay what it is worth.
- A pipeline needs to be built to get the gas/oil out of the forest. It will be 15-20 years before the area sees any money at all.
- The economic gains from oil/gas leasing will be offset by losses in other areas such as grazing, recreation and tourism. The development and maintenance of oil/gas extraction will be noisy (diesel engines) and will generate traffic in the forest. All these developments will negatively impact, if not destroy, the reasons that people come to the FLNF. Businesses that depend on tourism and recreation will suffer.
- The EIS shows that grazing lands would be negatively affected.
- The money will go to Washington not to the local people. Local people bare the brunt but do not get an equitable share of the rewards.
- The FLNF needs to be a good neighbor, and sometimes you have to give something up because its important to your neighbors.

Timber

Among the people we talked with who spoke specifically about timber issues, there was a consensus that the forest must be maintained for future generations. Business people interested primarily in tourism, concerned citizens who use the trails for recreation, groups involved in forest issues, and other individuals all agreed. Their interest in its long term viability ranged from a preservationist perspective to a purely pragmatic perspective – the pragmatists felt that the forest was an important economic resource for the region and that future generations needed to be able to count on its benefits. Within that general consensus there are different opinions about how to best maintain the forest and respond to current needs. Some people are against commercial logging. They give the following reasons:

- It does not make ecological or economic sense in the FLNF.
- Commercial logging is detrimental to the health of the forest and the ecology of the area, and it interferes with the natural progression of forest development.
- The FLNF is too small a forest to be commercially viable as a timber lot.
- Given the FLNF's size when timber is taken it has adverse effects on the other uses, such as recreation and tourism.

Others have mixed feelings. Although they might like more primitive conditions, they know that local people benefit from the revenue that comes from timber sales and from free firewood. Many said that old growth has a role to play, and there should be areas for old growth.

A number of people cited economic benefits of the forest such as timber sales, oil/gas leasing, etc. They supported those things not because they thought they were a good idea in themselves, but because they feared that support for the forest would disappear if people did not benefit in those ways.

Another opinion offered was that the FLNF could and should be managed for timber for the following reasons:

- Timber is a source of revenue.
- Timber management improves the health of the forest: Diversity is key to the forest both for timber and wildlife. It is good that the forest has old growth, that it harvests trees, and that it has grasslands. Different habitats provide for different kinds of wildlife.
- Timber management improves the enjoyment of visitors. Visitors enjoy greater diversity.
- Timber management generates knowledge that benefits business and society. The USFS does not have to operate like a business and can take risks that businesses can not afford to take. For example, the FLNF is trying to regenerate native trees that no longer grow around here, such as oak. That type of management improves forest diversity, provides nuts for wildlife, and can provide a model for commercial forests, if it works.

- Timber management prevents the forest from being dominated by shade trees such as beech, birch, and hemlock. These trees provide neither good timber nor habitat for wildlife.

Tourism

Tourism is a major economic activity for the region, and the FLNF is a “major selling point” for the area. The FLNF provides historical, ecological, cultural, and recreational activities for the visitor. The Chambers of Commerce promote the FLNF using their own funds. Increasing tourism is an important issue to some stakeholders.

Recreational activities provided by the FLNF are important to tourism; they are activities people want. The forest is one of the few family-oriented attractions in the area – parents and children enjoy walking in the woods, camping, exploring, etc.

There is no coordination between the USFS and the Chambers and/or town boards on tourism issues. New York State sends park representatives to Chamber meetings. They provide information that is helpful, and they also promote the parks. The FLNF has very little visibility and promotion falls to local organizations.

Caywood Point is seen by some as a valuable addition to the tourist industry and to the FLNF. However, others fear that though visitors might initially go to Caywood Point because of their interest in the forest they will be distracted by the lake and never go to the forest.

Trails

Trails are important to individuals and to tourism. They bring people to the forest, and provide families a place to recreate together. The state parks in the area are overcrowded, and the FLNF helps address this need. Access to natural areas contributes to the general mental/physical health of a society.

Managing multiple uses on the trails is a challenge because some uses conflict. Trails maintenance is also an ongoing concern.

Watershed Interests

The forest is an important part of the watershed and plays an important role in protecting the watershed. It is part of a bigger ecological system. The health of the watershed needs to be considered in decision-making.

Components of a Good Public Process

When people were asked what they hoped to see in a good public involvement process they addressed several general areas: community relations, fairness, education, promoting dialogue, increasing participation, and maintaining ongoing involvement.

Community Relations

People spoke about the need for the public to have confidence in the USFS. They listed several things that would be necessary to create this confidence. They believe USFS staff need to:

- work and live in the community;
- have an investment in the welfare of the community;
- be seen at community meetings, community centers, historical societies, and local stores;
- get to know the people and their views;

Fairness

The public had specific ideas about what was needed for a fair process. These ideas included:

- There is a contradiction inherent in asking for public involvement and reserving the right to make the final decision. Since this requirement can not be changed, some individuals want the USFS to articulate the criteria they will use to make their decisions.
- The biases of the USFS and other stakeholders should be disclosed. It is important for people to know what other people's interests are.
- The financial benefits of different management alternatives to individuals, local government, and organizations should be disclosed.
- Proposals made by gas and oil companies should be open to the public.
- Conflicts of interest should be disclosed.
- Documents should be written so general public can understand. Backup data should be available for those who want to see it.
- USFS documents such as the *Fifteen Year Retrospective* should include authors' names, qualifications, etc.
- The rules for participating in the plan revision process should be explicit.

Education

Education on management issues was thought to be needed, specifically education about:

- the interests of each group;
- cultural differences between long time residents and newcomers;
- the importance of a forest management plan; and
- forest issues such as timber harvest, wildlife habitat, ecology, etc.

People wanted to see brochures on forest issues with well-researched information, accessible language, and relevant bibliographies.

Promoting Dialogue

Specific ideas about how to work on the issues and reach a decision were:

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- Create an atmosphere where everyone gets to speak.
- Provide an opportunity for people to talk about the cultural differences between long time residents and others.
- Widen the circle of people consulted. Current people involved represent narrow interests.
- Provide a moderator.
- Form working groups with sharply defined goals and time frames that include people who have strongly opposing views on the issues. Include a USFS staff person to explain rules and regulations so that people do not spend time making a plan that can not be implemented.
- Conduct open forum public meetings on each issue and announce the topic ahead of time.
- Hold a series of facilitated meetings. Facilitators should be experienced.
- Develop 4 to 6 forest plans to talk about and compare.
- Form representative committees to discuss the various issues.

Concerns were raised about the inability or unwillingness of people to speak up in meetings. People with strong personalities or narrowly focused interest groups were said to dominate the discussion. Individuals are often unable or afraid to disagree with the majority or a very strong person in a public meeting. Some ideas for addressing this concern are:

- Hold meetings in conjunction with regularly scheduled town board meetings. People will feel more comfortable speaking out at their town board meetings than in meetings held by the USFS with people attending from outside the area.
- Hold meetings with small groups with similar interests.

Increasing Participation

Ideas for how to publicize meetings included:

- using radio stations and Elmira TV channels 18 and 36;
- placing flyers in gas stations, grocery stores, laundromats – places where people go;
- mailing notices of scheduled meetings two weeks in advance;
- posting meeting dates on community signs, e.g. the Fire Department highway sign. People drive by these signs everyday, and they are a good reminder.
- placing notices in newspapers, although these do not work very well.
- e-mail;
- having a contact person in each area who can give people accurate information about the meetings and the process. (Many people in the area have to make long distance phone calls to get information.)

Another way to increase attendance is scheduling meetings so they do not conflict with important community events.

Maintaining Ongoing Involvement

People expressed concern that communication be maintained on a regular basis after the plan revision process is over. Suggestions made were:

- holding mixers at the USFS offices to acquaint local government and tourist industry the FLNF;
- having meetings between the USFS and the county Chambers of Commerce to exchange ideas;
- a weekly newspaper column about forest issues written by a USFS staff person;
- including a town representative on the board of the FLNF visitor center;
- having a liaison with area schools to promote programs in the forest and build long term support for the forest;
- keeping track of the number of visitors to the forest each year so that tourist tax revenue can be credited to the forest; and
- including a USFS person on the Chambers of Commerce for regular information sharing.