

Need for Change

Description of Proposal for Revising the *Forest Plan* of the Hoosier National Forest

The Hoosier National Forest proposes to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. This document includes a description of proposal for revising the *Forest Plan*, and supplementary Information. Section G (Pages 32 to 37) contains the Notice of Intent as proposed to be published in the Federal Register.

**USDA Forest Service
Eastern Region**

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A. Introduction: The *Forest Plan* and Plan Revision

What is a *Forest Plan*?

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act and the National Forest Management Act of 1976 require that a Land and Resource Management Plan (*Forest Plan or Plan*) be prepared for each national forest. The *Forest Plan* is a management strategy that guides all natural resource management activities and establishes management guidance for the national forest.

Our *Forest Plan* provides for multiple use and sustained yield of goods and services from National Forest System lands in a way that results in maximum long-term net public benefits in an environmentally sound manner.

What decisions are we making in our *Forest Plan*?

The *Forest Plan* provides a programmatic framework for decision-making on National Forest System lands for a period of 10 to 15 years. Within the *Forest Plan*, we make decisions in the following six areas:

1. Forest-wide multiple-use goals and objectives
2. Forest-wide management requirements
3. Management area direction
4. Lands suited and not suited for resource use and production (timber management etc.)
5. Monitoring and evaluation requirements
6. Recommendations to Congress (such as wilderness), if any.

What factors indicate a need to revise a plan?

The National Forest Management Act of 1976 provides direction for revising the *Forest Plan*. In addition to the prescribed timeline for revisions (at least every 15 years), four additional indicators can direct the need for a revision. According to those indicators, we may revise the *Forest Plan*:

- When conditions of the land or demands of the public have changed significantly.
- When changes in Agency policies, goals, or objectives would have a significant effect on forest programs.
- When an interdisciplinary team recommends a revision during the monitoring and evaluation process.
- When new information suggests that a revision is necessary (as stated in the Forest Service handbook on environmental policy and procedures [FSH 1909.15]).

Why is it time to revise the current *Forest Plan*?

At this time, there are two reasons to revise the 1991 *Forest Plan*:

1. The Regional Forester approved the original Hoosier National Forest *Plan* in September 1985.
2. National guidance for strategic plan and programs has changed since 1991.

It is 15 years since the Regional Forester approved the original plan on September 17, 1985. The National Forest Management Act of 1976 requires that such plans be revised at least every 15 years. Since 1985, we amended the plan four times. The Forest Supervisor approved the last amendment June 23, 1994. On February 27, 2000, we asked the public for comments on Proposed Amendment 5 (Special Areas). Many people believe we revised the Forest Plan in 1991. In the significant amendment of April 1991, the Regional Forester completely replaced the 1985 *Forest Plan*. However, because we did not look at the wilderness issue, that amendment was not a revision.

Agency goals and objectives, along with other national guidance for strategic plans and programs, have changed since 1991. The agency completed the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision) (<http://www.fs.fed.us/plan>) to comply with the Government Performance and Results Act. This plan documents the agency commitment to sustainable forest management. The strategic plan lays out the goals and objectives for the USDA Forest Service for the next five years. The strategic plan uses the findings of the 2000 Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA) Assessment to develop long-term goals, objectives, and measures. The plan has four long-term goals: ecosystem health, multiple benefits to people, scientific and technical assistance, and effective public service. This strategic plan affects Hoosier National Forest programs. An example is the greater emphasis on watershed health. In particular, we will better describe the desired future condition of healthy watersheds, we will evaluate how well watersheds on the forest meet that condition, and we will include direction in the plan on how we will manage watersheds that do not meet the condition. This emphasis on watersheds is a direct result from the strategic goal of ecosystem health.

Our framework for evaluating the sustainability of forest management will be the Montreal Process Criteria and indicators.¹ The Local Unit Criteria and Indicators Development Project (LUCID) will further refine the criteria and indicators and determine the steps involved in implementing local unit measures of sustainability nationwide and how they link to national level (Montreal Process) criteria and indicators (<http://www.fs.fed.us/institute/lucid/>).

How were areas in need of revision determined?

To set the stage for the revision, the Forest Service developed a preliminary list of potential need for change topics. We based this preliminary list on review of the following:

- Monitoring and evaluation results of implementing the 1991 *Forest Plan*
- The *Forest Plan* and project level appeal issues and decisions
- Lawsuit issues and decisions

¹ USDA Forest Service First Approximation Report for Sustainable Forest Management: Report of the United States of the Criteria and Indicators for the Sustainable Management of Temperate and Boreal Forests, June 1997. Washington, DC: USDA Forest Service.

- New scientific information
- Changed conditions of the land
- Changing public demands
- The USDA Forest Service Government Performance and Results Act Strategic Plan (2000)

Results of this review indicated that much of the information and direction in the 1991 *Forest Plan* is still appropriate. We would carry forward these aspects into the revised plan with little or no change. The review also pointed out several concerns that we cannot effectively handle through planning or plan revision because they are operational, budget dependent, or outside the control of the Forest Service. For instance responses from the public indicate concerns with trail maintenance practices such as trail hardening with gravel. We would address these important issues outside of plan revision, as they are not strategic plan issues but operational issues.

How was the public involved in this review process?

Once we identified aspects of the 1991 *Forest Plan* that potentially needed changed and could be effectively addressed in plan revision, the Forest Service shared this list with the public in a mailing of August 30, 1999 to nearly 7,000 people. The five potential topics for revision were:

- Role of the Hoosier National Forest
- Watershed Health and Restoration
- Timber harvesting/ vegetation management
- Prescribed Fire
- Trails

We invited the public to several public meetings:

- Open house in Bedford on September 16, 1999
- Open house in Jasper on September 23, 1999

The open houses were announced in the media, on the Hoosier website and included in the initial mailing to nearly 7,000 people announcing the beginning of plan revision. Each open house consisted of both an afternoon session and an evening session. Approximately 35 people participated in the Bedford sessions and about 20 people in the Jasper sessions.

- Role focus group meeting in Corydon on November 9, 1999
- Role focus group meeting in Martinsville on November 9, 1999

The focus group meetings on role of the Hoosier National Forest attempted to specifically identify cross-sections of the public and bring them together at the same table so they could begin the long-term collaborative process of working together and with the Forest Service during the plan revision - or other - process(es). These meetings were also open to the public via announcements in the media and on the website. At each meeting there were more members of the public than there were panelists. Members of the public also had the opportunity to speak and interact. Some chose to participate; others chose to listen.

- Trail group meeting in Bedford on December 6, 1999

The trail group meeting was another forum to continue efforts at collaboration. The intent of the meeting was for the group and public to collaborate on trail guidance found in the 1991 plan with

input on where changes were needed. Approximately 120 people attended the meeting and discussions centered on off road vehicle use on the forest.

Trail management was the topic most often identified by the people who responded to our mailings, requests for input, and meetings. It was a topic that we had pre-identified as a result of reviewing input on projects since the 1991 Plan was adopted. Discussing the role of the forest was important to lay the foundation for future proposals and public involvement efforts. The forest intends to use group processes on other issues after publication of the NOI.

- Draft Need for Change Meeting in French Lick, on September 6, 2000.

At the Draft Need for Change Meeting, we accepted comments from the public on our 33 page Draft Need for Change. We announced the meeting in the media, on the Hoosier website, and included a 4 page summary of the Draft Need for Change in a mailing to nearly 6, 600 people. The purpose of the meeting was to (1) establish opportunities for the public to generate ideas, concerns, and alternatives, (2) present and clarify proposed changes to the *Forest Plan*, describe ways that individuals could respond to the Draft Need for Change, and accept comments from the public. Approximately 50 people attended the meeting and most comments were about on off road vehicle use on the forest.

We also participated in a state and federal interagency meeting on December 17, 1999. The purpose of the meeting was to help us identify and clarify issues to be considered in revising the *Forest Plan*, and discuss ways our agencies can collaborate during the planning process. This is only the beginning of public meetings on *Forest Plan* revision. We will have many more meetings and opportunities to be involved.

How did we develop the preliminary proposal?

An interdisciplinary team of federal employees proposed changes in management direction for the topics, considering and incorporating ideas and concerns from the public as they developed the proposals for change. The Strategy Team (line officers and the planning and public affairs officer) then developed the core team recommendations into a single proposal, which we present in this document.

What is addressed in this revision effort?

We focused our proposed revision effort on information and direction representing the greatest need for change. This included looking at forest goals, watershed health, ecosystem sustainability, recreation management, and roadless area inventory and evaluation. We propose to address other topics outside of the *Forest Plan* revision process (See Section C). However, we will adapt our revision effort to changing conditions and issues.

How do new Forest Service proposals affect the revision?

There are a number of new proposals that will have some affect on the revision if they become final. These include the proposals for a new planning rule, the road management policy, the roadless initiative, the Government Performance and Results Act strategic plan, and consultation with USDI Fish and Wildlife Service on federally listed species.

The Department of Agriculture expects to publish the final planning rule during the fall of 2000. The proposed rule directs how to conduct forest planning. Given the information in the draft rule and the projected timeline the Hoosier National Forest *Plan* revision will be finished under the new planning rule. The proposed planning rule focuses on four themes: sustainability, collaboration, use of best science, and adaptable forest plans. We considered many of the concepts of the proposed planning rule as part of this revision effort, including the need for more collaboration with the public and the use of the latest scientific information.

In addition, within this notice of intent, we reflect the other major concept of sustainability. We will continue to contribute to sustainable ecosystems, by maintaining and restoring ecosystems and watersheds consistent with the latest scientific knowledge. We will continue to contribute toward economic and social sustainability through collaboration with interested or affected people, consideration of social and economic information, and by providing products and services. In its present form, the proposed planning rule would not have a substantial change on the intent of the current proposal. However, the proposed rule would likely change the process of how we address our proposal.

A draft National Forest System Road Management Policy was released March 3, 2000, and is scheduled to be final in fall 2000. The policy will contain direction on analysis standards for assessing the need for new road construction; for evaluating the existing road network to determine what roads are necessary for future management; and for identifying what roads can be decommissioned. Site-specific road management decisions would not be resolved within the revised *Forest Plan*. National forest staff would continue to work on inventories and opportunities for needed and unneeded roads. The forest plan revision will set the desired conditions, objectives, and standards for roads on the forest. This road policy will provide a methodology for implementing those goals and objectives.

The USDA Forest Service released the Roadless Area Conservation Proposed Rule and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for comment May 9, 2000. The final rule is expected during fall 2000. The agency proposes management direction for roadless and unroaded areas within all National Forests. Direction pertaining to forest plans will also be incorporated into the revision. The existing revision effort already plans to inventory and evaluate any roadless areas that may be suitable for congressional designation as wilderness per existing planning rules. In addition, the consideration of the management of other unroaded areas is part of the existing revision effort. We will be also be guided by public comment and concern for what types of activities should occur in these areas.

On October 18, 2000, the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Interior published in the Federal Register a Unified Federal Policy (UFP) for Watershed. The policy is intended to promote a unified approach to better watershed management in order to protect water quality and the health of aquatic systems on federal lands. The policy has two goals: use a watershed approach to prevent and reduce water pollution resulting from federal management activities; and accomplish this in a unified and cost-effective matter. There is broad support for the Unified Federal Policy. Eight federal departments and agencies have signed the Unified Federal Policy. Objectives include consistent procedures for classifying watersheds, use a watershed approach when protecting and restoring watersheds, improve compliance with Clean Water Act, and enhance collaboration among Federal agencies, States, stakeholders, and private landowners. We will use the UFP to guide us in describing the desired future condition of healthy watersheds, and evaluating the health of our current watersheds.

The 2000 revision of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan lays out the goals and objectives for the USDA Forest Service for the next five years. The plan has four long-term goals: ecosystem

health, multiple benefits to people, scientific and technical assistance, and effective public service. The strategic plan incorporates our agency mission to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. Our revision analysis would work toward achieving the long-term goals of the strategic plan. Most of our changes focus on ecosystem health; however, in our evaluation of these changes will consider benefits to people, best science, and public service.

The forest is currently in consultation with the USDI Fish and Wildlife Service about the effects of Forest Service management activities on the Indiana bat and other federally listed species. We would ultimately incorporate any new information developed during that process into the revised *Forest Plan*.

B. The Proposal for Revising our *Forest Plan*

Our goal is to provide the public with an overview of proposed changes to the current *Forest Plan*. We address the changes for the following two areas: plan goals and revision topics.

1. Plan Goals

Proposal Summary: The revised *Forest Plan* would add the goal of conservation of endangered and threatened species habitat, add the goal to maintain and restore watershed health, and change a current goal from “to protect and manage ecosystems” to maintain and restore sustainable ecosystems.

We propose changing the major plan goals by adding three new plan goals (noted in bold text):

- **Conservation of Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat**
- **Maintain and Restore Sustainable Ecosystems;**
- **Maintain and Restore Watershed Health;**
- Protect our Cultural Heritage;
- Provide for a Visually Pleasing Landscape;
- Provide Recreation Use in Harmony with Natural Communities;
- Provide a Useable Landbase;² and,
- Provide for Human and Community Development.

The last five goals are the same as in the current *Forest Plan*. No changes are proposed to these goals.

We propose to add the goal of **conservation of endangered species and threatened species habitat** to further demonstrate our commitment to the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Protection of Federal endangered and threatened species is high priority. For instance we would maintain guidance for management similar to what is currently located in Appendix C – Endangered, Threatened, and Sensitive Species (*Forest Plan*, C8-10). While we would not be directly addressing broad changes to the 1991 *Forest Plan* guidance for protecting Federally listed species, some changes to this guidance will likely be necessary after consulting with USDI Fish and Wildlife Service.

We propose to change our current goal of protect and manage ecosystems to **maintain and restore sustainable ecosystems** to adapt to the sustainable forest management strategy of the USDA Forest Service Natural Resource Agenda.

We propose to add the goal to **maintain and restore watershed health**. We believe it is important to:

- Reaffirm the historic mission of the Hoosier National Forest for watershed protection and restoration.

² The Forest needs to provide a landbase that provides better potential for biological diversity, enhances recreational opportunities, is easier for people to find, and increases management efficiency.

- Integrate knowledge about watersheds and ecological principles into the revised plan.
- Demonstrate the sustainability of biological, social, and economic factors within watersheds.
- Stimulate grass roots collaborative stewardship of watersheds.
- Emphasize watershed restoration which helps set priorities for: riparian land acquisition; wetlands restoration; watershed improvements; and road and trail maintenance, construction, and decommissioning.
- Restore and/or maintain soil quality and function.

2. Revision Topics

- A. Watershed Health
- B. Ecosystem Sustainability
- C. Recreation Management
- D. Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation
- E. Wild and Scenic, and Recreational River Recommendations
- F. Scenery Management

A. Watershed Health

Proposal Summary: The revised *Forest Plan* would identify desired conditions for healthy watersheds and riparian areas. The revised *Forest Plan* would also include direction to protect and restore watershed health and it would include updated riparian guidance.

The Hoosier National Forest is able to provide watershed protection in an area that is dominated by private land including: private forests; small farms, many with livestock, pasture, and cultivated fields; permanent homes; and small communities. The Hoosier National Forest is dominated by close-canopied hardwood forests and contains several 1,000+ acre contiguous blocks of habitat. The forests provide protection to the watershed by reducing erosion and sedimentation. Riparian vegetation along streams, lakes and rivers is dominated by natural succession. Roads and trails are located to minimize impacts to riparian areas. Wetland restoration and creation are accomplished where feasible.

The current plan emphasizes conservation, maintenance, and restoration of plant and animal communities to enhance biological diversity. This is important; however, this framework does not address important concepts in watershed health as defined by the draft National Forest Management Act Regulations. Watershed protection is a primary purpose of the Hoosier National Forest per the Weeks Act of 1911, which enabled the purchase of national forest lands in the eastern United States.

Recent public comments on our potential need for change topics support watershed protection as an important theme for natural resource management. People said:

- “I support karst³ protection.”
- “When economics are considered, need to increase emphasis on water quality and minimize soil erosion.”

³ Karst is a terrain, underlain by limestone, in which the topography is chiefly formed by the dissolving of rock, and which is commonly characterized by closed depressions, subterranean drainage, and caves

- Our group “supports ponds, lakes, and restoration of wetlands.”

The current plan needs to be revised to clarify ecological potential and desired conditions for healthy watersheds and riparian areas. Also we would:

- Identify relative watershed health;
- Identify those watersheds that are most healthy and which may serve as “references” for protection and restoration;
- Identify watersheds within which Hoosier National Forest restoration actions may result in measurable changes to watershed health; and,
- Identify criteria for prioritizing watershed protection and restoration.

Another means of meeting the new goal of maintaining and restoring watershed health is to improve riparian guidance. The three changes proposed are:

- Consider the riparian areas in a broad watershed perspective.
- Clearly define the desired future condition of riparian areas.
- Clarify the current direction on standards and guidelines so that it is more easily understood.

Watershed protection and restoration may include emphasis on protecting watersheds that are most healthy and investments in those with significant departures from water and soil quality standards. Actions in relatively healthy watersheds may include control of undesirable non-native species and working with partners and interested landowners on conservation easements. The revised plan would include criteria for watershed protection and restoration and would identify the relative health of watersheds that contain National Forest System lands. Priorities for protection and for capital investment actions that may be taken within several years of revising the *Forest Plan* would be identified.

B. Ecosystem Sustainability

Proposal Summary: The forest proposes to add desired conditions to sustain a wide range of habitat to provide for population viability of species and existing communities within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest. The revised Forest Plan will add an ecosystem approach that emphasizes ecosystem integrity, which complements the focus on population viability in assessment and management.

A population viability assessment will be used to identify measures for contributing to viability on National Forest system lands. Vegetation management is proposed to maintain or enhance ecosystems. Within Management Area 2.8 we propose to allow a full range of vegetative management practices. The management indicator species list would be revised consistent with planning regulations. We would evaluate potential RNA's using the current selection criteria.

The Hoosier National Forest currently provides a wide range of habitats including: closed canopy hardwood forests, forest openings, cave/karst ecosystems, pine plantations, barrens, cliffs, riparian habitat and limited amounts of early successional forested stands. These areas provide habitat for a wide variety of species. There are several large parcels of National Forest System land, however, the majority of it is interspersed to varying degrees with private land. As a result, the block size of

suitable habitat for various species is small in many locations, which makes management to sustain viable populations difficult.

We will focus on the following five areas that address ecosystem sustainability in the revised *Forest Plan*:

1. Viable Populations
2. Management Areas
3. Vegetation Management
4. Management Indicator Species
5. Research Natural Areas

We propose to sustain a wide range of habitats and mitigate threats necessary to provide, within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest: 1) the viability for species populations and 2) vegetative communities associated with south-central Indiana. An ecological analysis has begun that will encompass the Hoosier and Shawnee National Forests. This analysis will look at the historical and current vegetative conditions across the landscape, and will compare the two conditions. In addition, information will be gathered on how human and natural disturbances have impacted the landscape and trends will be discussed. Information from this analysis will be used in the population viability assessment. The results of the ecological analysis, population viability assessment, and ecological land type phase analysis will be examined to determine how, or if, the desired future conditions outlined in the existing plan need to be modified to provide for population viability within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest. This approach results in an emphasis on ecosystem integrity, which complements the focus on species viability in assessment and management.

We received many comments, some of which are conflicting, about ecosystem sustainability and the management of habitat for wildlife species during our public meetings. Typical comments include:

- “Support protect and manage ecosystems -- provide wide variety of species and habitats.”
- “Concern that [currently there are] too great a variety of habitats”
- “Take into account that 95% of State provides other habitat. Forest needs to provide that not provided by others (private land owners).”
- “Clarify role, importance, direction for [threatened, endangered, and sensitive species] TES and overall wildlife diversity”
- “Increase habitat for early and mid-successional wildlife species.”
- “Add goal to primary purpose to provide interior mature forest.”

To formalize our commitment to the conservation of biological diversity, we propose to add or modify three major plan goals. They are: 1) Conservation of Endangered and Threatened Species Habitat, 2) Maintain and Restore Watershed Health, and 3) Maintain and Restore Sustainable Ecosystems.

1. Viable Populations

Proposal Summary: The forest proposes to provide habitat to provide for viability of populations of plants and animals within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest. The revised *Forest Plan* will add an ecosystem approach that emphasizes ecosystem integrity, which complements the focus on

population viability in assessment and management. A population viability assessment will be used to identify measures for contributing to viability on National Forest system lands.

Our desired condition is to provide for population viability of plant and animal species within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest over time (for 10, 50, 100 years). The National Forest Management Act (NFMA) requires guidelines that “provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area in order to meet overall multiple-use objectives.” USDA regulation 9500-4 extends our requirements to: “Manage habitats of all existing native and desired non-native plants, fish, and wildlife species in order to maintain at least viable populations of such species.” We intend to do the following:

- Maintain or enhance ecosystem sustainability;
- Maintain viable populations when possible and contribute to viability of populations that exist primarily outside the national forest boundaries;
- Make contributions to wildlife and plant species recovery;
- Maintain an array of habitats across the landscape which will meet the needs of a variety of species, so there is less need to designate additional sensitive species; and,
- Aid in the delisting of endangered, threatened, and sensitive species.

In order to accomplish this, we will start by doing a population viability assessment. The following changes in species information need to be addressed:

- Changes in information about species populations based on surveys conducted since the last plan amendment;
- Changes in the way viability has been analyzed in other agency efforts; and,
- Concerns about continuing declines of some species on a continental and regional scale.

The USDA Forest Service provides necessary wildlife and plant habitat to provide for population viability within our capability. If the population viability assessment indicates needed changes in the current plan, these changes will become part of our proposal.

As a means of assessing the communities that may need restoration, we will use the ecological classification system of Ecological Land Type (ELT) and Ecological Land Type Phase (ELTP), as well as review the latest information on the range of terrestrial and aquatic conditions that existed on the forest prior to European settlement. Given land use patterns and history of the forest and surrounding region, we recognize that some communities may be in an undesirable condition. The extent of maintenance or restoration of individual communities will be strongly influenced by both the ecological capability and the desired conditions for maintaining the viability of terrestrial and aquatic populations.

2. Management Areas

Proposal Summary: The forest proposes to maintain the existing array of management areas, however, the boundaries may be modified.

The current plan provides a blend of different desired conditions in management areas across the forest, with emphasis on native plant and animal communities and provisions for large forest ecosystems with relatively little manipulation. This blend has worked well and provides for a

diversity of plant and animal communities on both local and regional scales. The following descriptions are from the current *Forest Plan*. We may modify the exact boundaries based and specific management area descriptions based on resource assessments.

Management Area 2.4: This management area (about 17,000 acres) is associated with canoeable and fishable streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs. The desired future condition is characterized by forested shorelines or corridors up to 1 mile or more in width, with an appearance of an unbroken canopy of large-diameter trees of a variety of species. Natural succession is featured in this management area. Some existing forest openings with value for wildlife, vegetation, or recreation may be maintained. M.A. 2.4 guidance protects the values and potential Wild and Scenic River classification of the Lost and Little Blue rivers. Wetlands may be developed or restored as sites permit.

Management Area 2.8: This management area (about 100,000 acres) is associated with a variety of forest plant communities. The desired future condition is characterized by a high degree of vertical and horizontal vegetative diversity. These areas include many scattered blocks of forestland. A variety of tree species is present, but shade-tolerant species may dominate some forest communities over time. A natural variety of other tree species intermediate in shade tolerance will be perpetuated and dominate in other forest communities. This area will provide a variety of forest types, reflecting different ecological sites and management activities. Openings in the canopy result in different canopy levels and animal communities associated with vertically diverse, shade-tolerant vegetation, as well as different successional stages of vegetation. In general, 4-12 percent of the area should be in young hardwood stands (0 to 9-year age class). We may create or maintain forest openings. Trees are harvested to achieve desired plant and animal diversity and to provide forest products. About two-thirds of the forested lands in Management Area 2.8 are suitable for timber production. Fishing lakes, wetlands, ponds, and waterholes may be provided.

Management Area 5.1: This management area (12, 953 acres) is for the Congressionally designated Charles C. Deam Wilderness. Extensive areas of old-growth vegetation characterize the desired future condition. Stands will be characterized by large, mature or overmature trees. Some younger trees and openings occur because of natural processes. Habitat management for fish and wildlife may occur to the extent it is consistent with wilderness management objectives and to meet the needs of Federal endangered, threatened, and sensitive species.

Management Area 6.2: This management area (about 20,000 acres) creates a physical setting that provides an opportunity for solitude and a feeling of closeness to nature. The area is general forestland with the appearance of extensive stands of forest dominating the landscape. Many of these areas are in backcountry. The desired future condition is extensive stands of natural-appearing forests. Stands will be dominated by large mature and overmature trees. Some younger trees and openings will occur because of natural causes. There will be no commercial timber management, forest opening maintenance, or surface-disturbing mineral activity. Management activities permitted for wildlife are only those needed to protect endangered, threatened, and sensitive species.

Management Area 6.4: This management area (about 25,000 acres) creates a physical setting that provides an opportunity for solitude and a feeling of closeness to nature. The desired future condition is extensive natural forest comprised of native plant and animal communities. The forest will be moving towards an old growth condition. Natural barrens, glades, wetlands, and dry forest, which contain unique species and plant communities, may be restored and perpetuated. Existing forest openings with value for wildlife, vegetation, or recreation may be maintained adjacent to roads required for existing access rights, or specially adapted trails which access rare species or communities. Currently maintained openings may be retained at Mogan Ridge, Luke's Knob, and Felknor Hollow.

Management Area 7.1 (Developed Recreation Areas): These areas (about 6,000 acres) are established to provide for recreation facilities and highly developed areas. They include campgrounds, visitor centers, swimming beaches, and other areas intended to serve large numbers of people. Use in these areas is high-density, destination-type use. Recreation areas include: Hardin Ridge, German Ridge, Tipsaw Lake, Celina Lake, Springs Valley, Indian Lake, Buzzard Roost, Saddle Lake, Blackwell Horse Camp, and Blackwell Pond. Vegetation is primarily hardwood forest with a natural variety of tree and shrub species. A small amount of shrub/herbaceous openings are provided for visual variety, play fields, and plant and animal diversity.

Management Area 8.1 (Research Natural Areas): The only designated Research Natural Area on the Hoosier National Forest at this time is the Pioneer Mothers Memorial Forest, an 88-acre old growth hardwood forest. This designation allows unique ecosystems to follow natural processes for scientific purposes. The desired future condition is a natural-appearing condition exists although evidence of humans is occasionally noticeable.

Management Area 8.2 (Special Areas): These are designated special areas (about 13,000 acres) that include unique or unusual ecological, botanical, zoological, geological, scenic, historic, prehistoric, and other areas that merit special recognition and management. Management of these areas will emphasize the protection, perpetuation, or restoration of their special features and values. Management activities will occur as needed to protect endangered, threatened, and sensitive plant and animal species. Vegetation management will occur only to accomplish the purpose of special area designation and to meet the needs of Federal endangered, threatened, and sensitive species.

Management Area 8.3 (Experimental Forest): This management area (632 acres) provides for research and scientific study of forest ecosystems. At present, the only Experimental Forest on the Hoosier National Forest is the Paoli Experimental Forest, a 632-acre area located southwest of Paoli on the Tell City Ranger District. The research projects established in this area set the goals for management of ecosystems in these areas. Maintenance and establishment of wildlife habitat developments are allowed.

Management Area 9.2: This management area (1,586 acres) emphasizes the protection and maintenance of environmental values associated with unique ecosystems. This designation serves as a holding category until further study and recommendations on specific designation can be made. Management is directed at protecting these lands until the areas can be studied for designation as Research Natural Areas (M.A. 8.1), Special Areas (M.A. 8.2), other general forest management areas, or possible designation as State Natural Areas or National Natural Landmarks. Vegetation management will not occur unless needed to protect adjoining lands from pests or fire, or to protect the resources and existing investments.

The following management areas emphasize natural processes as determining factors for maturing ecosystems: MA 2.4, which enhances and perpetuates the physical and biological attributes of streams, lakeshores, and riparian areas; 5.1; 6.2; 6.4; 8.1 Research Natural Areas; and 8.2 Special Areas. Between these areas, wherever possible, the forest works to establish "linkages" to tie together scattered areas of mature forest. These linkages are often located in management area 2.8. We propose to continue to use these management areas and linkages to help conserve biodiversity. Based on resource assessments, we may modify the exact boundaries of these management areas.

Within Management Area 2.8 (general forest, provides young forest, mostly by uneven-aged methods, forest openings, timber products, minerals), we propose to continue to use a variety of silvicultural

methods, including harvesting, to provide different types of habitats and conditions for a variety of species and communities, including early successional habitat.

3. Vegetation Management

Proposal Summary: Vegetation management will be used to maintain or enhance ecosystems. The forest proposes to maintain the current ASQ and allow a full range of vegetation management activities in Management Area 2.8.

Active vegetation management will be used to meet desired conditions to sustain or enhance biodiversity. Some communities such as barrens and possibly others are in need of restoration on the forest. Other revision topics may identify desired future conditions that require specific habitat types needed to create habitat for a particular desirable species.

During public meetings, we received many conflicting comments about vegetation management. Some typical comments include:

- “Because [public] land percentage is so small in the State of Indiana and current timber needs are met by private landowners, National Forest timber should not be harvested.”
- “De-emphasize timber harvest”
- “Opposed to timber harvesting...”
- Our group “supports a full spectrum of timber harvest systems.”
- “Because different wildlife requires different habitats, I support clearcutting for ruffed grouse habitat...”
- “We would also encourage timber harvest to benefit many species. (from amphibians on up.)”

We would continue to use timber harvest and vegetation management such as mowing and prescribed fire as management tools. They would be used within the context of perpetuating and enhancing biological diversity at different spatial scales and for different desired conditions in the various management areas. Timber harvest, mowing, and prescribed fire are methods of providing diverse ecosystems and accomplishing wildlife, recreation, visual, and silvicultural management objectives. We also propose to employ vegetation management to restore native plant and animal communities and ecosystems. For example, replacing fescue with native warm season grasses and forbs and removing non-native pines so native hardwood communities can flourish.

The current desired future condition for Management Area 2.8 is not specific: “The desired future condition (DFC) is characterized by a high degree of vertical and horizontal vegetative diversity. ... A variety of tree species is present, but shade-tolerant species may dominate some forest communities over time. A natural variety of other tree species intermediate in shade tolerance will be perpetuated and dominate in other forest communities.” Since we developed the Forest Plan in 1991, we have developed an ecological classification and are currently mapping the Ecological Landtypes (ELT’s) and Ecological Landtype Phases (ELTP’s). The information generated from mapping the ELT’s and ELTP’s will show us where various vegetative types, such as oak-hickory should be located on the landscape.

There is a preponderance of overstory oak and hickory across the national forest, however in general, the understory consists primarily of more shade-tolerant maple and beech. Oak and hickory trees

provide acorns and nuts for a multitude of wildlife species, add to stand diversity, and are valuable hardwood species. The oak-hickory type will not regenerate itself on many sites without appropriate management and will move towards the sugar maple and beech type forest condition. Historically, within oak-hickory stands periodic underburns killed other tree species and understory vegetation, but not the oak trees. These underburns occurred frequently enough that the understory remained open and allowed sufficient light to reach the forest floor. We propose to use prescribed fire, perhaps in combination with other vegetation management, to enhance the understory oak component. Maintaining the understory oak component will allow oak to continue to be a primary overstory species. We will modify our desired future condition for Management Area 2.8 so it states that we intend to regenerate oak-hickory forests within the dry forests types of the appropriate ELTP's.

We would continue to emphasize native plant and animal species and communities. We would continue to avoid planting domesticated plant species and preventing the introduction of exotic plant and animal species, which are apt to invade and compete with native communities. We will actively remove invasive exotic or non-native species that threaten native communities. This could be accomplished by a variety of methods including manual and mechanical removal and possibly herbicides.

We would continue to develop and maintain stands of the appropriate size, variety, and structure to meet desired future conditions and located to form interconnecting corridors, if possible. We would emphasize large diameter trees and mature or overmature stands, particularly around ponds, lakes, wetlands, and stream shorelines.

Within Management Area 2.8, general forest, the size of harvest units for regeneration cuts would remain limited to 1 acre for group selection, 5 acres in hardwood clearcut areas, 10 acres in pine clearcut areas, and 10 acres in shelterwood areas. The maximum timber harvest level (allowable sale quantity [ASQ]) for the Hoosier NF is currently 4.4 million board feet per year or 44 million board feet in the first decade. We have harvested about 11 million-board feet since 1991; we salvaged most of this from the area impacted by the April 1996 tornado. We propose to maintain the current ASQ level. The actual ASQ will depend on further analysis of a number of other changes in the Plan. However, since we have had a great deal of interest in this decision we will assess the changes since 1991 to see if we need to change this policy.

4. Management Indicator Species

Proposal Summary: The management indicator species list will be revised consistent with planning regulations.

Another way to maintain and restore sustainable ecosystems is through the use of management indicator species (MIS) to gauge plan success and identify needed management change. We monitor and evaluate population trends of MIS species cooperatively with state agencies and universities to determine the effects of management.

The current plan includes a list of management indicator species. Through our monitoring efforts, we have determined that there are other species better suited as management indicator species. We would focus on species that are sensitive to management and can be readily monitored. Our proposal is to construct a revised list that is ecosystem community-oriented, i.e., species which indicate the health of each of these communities on the Forest: (1) dry forest, (2) mesic forest, (3) openland/brushland, and (4) streams and impoundments. Dry forest includes upland oak-hickory, barrens, and cliffs. Mesic

forest includes moist forest, ravines, lowlands, and cliffs. Openland/brushland includes openings, barrens, glades, and rights-of-way. Streams and impoundments include aquatic communities.

We started to revise the list in 1994 with the assistance of species experts but did not finish because of a national proposal to change the MIS requirements. The 1994 list is ecosystem community-oriented as discussed above and will be used as a starting point. The list will be revised based on recent studies, literature, population information, changes in species status, or other input. We will also reevaluate and modify methods to monitor population trends for the proposed MIS. We have already requested comments regarding MIS species from our forest plan revision interested party mailing list. In addition, some species experts provided their individual comments during a December 2, 1999 meeting in our office.

5. Research Natural Areas

Proposal Summary: Potential Research Natural Areas will be evaluated.

There has been increased emphasis on identifying potential research natural areas (pRNA's) that represent ecosystems. In the past, pRNA's were usually selected only on the basis of forest cover types or unique biotic communities. We propose to evaluate potential RNA's using the ecosystem-based selection criteria.

C. Recreation Management

Proposal Summary: The Forest Service and public have not identified a critical need to change the overall recreation program on the forest except to reevaluate the 1987 off road vehicle (ORV) use decision that prohibits ORV's in the forest.

Forest niche

Public land in the State of Indiana is at a premium. Indiana ranks near the bottom of the fifty states in the percent of public land available. With only 3% of the land base in public ownership and a high population density, there is high demand for the limited supply of outdoor recreation opportunities. As the only national forest in Indiana, the Hoosier NF serves several special needs in this environment. The forest niche is to provide backcountry opportunities, unrestricted primitive recreation, mountain biking, horse riding, wilderness experiences, hunting opportunities, and developed water-based recreation.

Large blocks of contiguous public land are generally rare throughout the state. The national forest is an exception, providing several 1,000+-acre areas for backcountry experiences. Such blocks provide solitude, hiking, camping, hunting, gathering forest products, and long distance trails used by horse riders, mountain bikers, and hikers.

The national forest is the only large-scale provider of mountain bike opportunities in Indiana. State policy prohibits use on Indiana Department of Natural Resources land and few local communities have the land base to provide this opportunity.

Indiana ranks high as an equestrian state. The forest and Indiana Department of Natural Resources are the only two major providers of this opportunity, and complement each other by providing trails and horse camps at strategic locations in southern Indiana.

Water-based recreation is at a premium due to the lack of natural lakes. Human-made lakes are extremely popular and recreation facilities located on them are in high demand. The national forest's premier developed recreation facilities are located on reservoirs and provide swimming, boating, fishing, and camping opportunities.

The rest of the national forest provides outdoor recreation opportunities, such as an open camping policy, hunting, target shooting, and gathering forest products, that are highly restricted or prohibited on other public lands in Indiana. For example, nowhere else in the state may one legally pull off to the side of the road and set up camp.

Tourism is an important industry in southern Indiana. National Forest System lands provide the scenic backdrop for driving tours such as those promoted by Historic Southern Indiana. Our campgrounds, swimming beaches, fishing lakes, multi-use trails, watchable wildlife sites, scenic overlooks, scenic cliffs, and boat ramps, are featured in tourist visitor guides. Forest personnel assist organizations by serving on committees to enhance tourism and in developing brochures.

Recreation and the 1991 *Forest Plan*

The 1991 *Forest Plan* addressed recreation concerns voiced by the public. The low amount of public recreational land and high population density resulting in high demand for outdoor recreational opportunities was considered. Some people wanted us to focus on providing natural-appearing forests and limited management. Others wanted us to manage the vegetation to provide more forest openings and young forest areas to provide premier hunting areas. It was evident that competing demands for space by a variety of forest users such as horse riders, hikers, and hunters can make it difficult for those seeking solitude. Other forest management goals such as providing diverse ecosystems, wood products, clean water, and wildlife habitat occasionally conflicted with some recreational desires. The *Forest Plan* provides different recreational opportunities in different parts of the forest.

The 12,953-acre Charles C. Deam Wilderness is dedicated to wilderness activities and offers the most primitive recreation. However, additional areas are managed to provide a backcountry experience with solitude and a natural-appearing forest environment. These areas are contiguous parcels of 1,000+ acres-- which are not easy to find on the national forest outside the wilderness. The backcountry parcels are identified by significant features within their boundaries and include Deckard Ridge, Porter Hollow, Hickory Ridge, Nebo Ridge, Felknor Hollow, Tincher Hollow, Lick Creek, Danner Cemetery, Happy Hollow, Mogan Ridge, Middle Deer Creek, and Mount Pleasant. These areas total 53,000 acres of large trees and limited roads. This is a rare opportunity in Indiana. These areas provide opportunities for remote hiking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and squirrel and turkey hunting.

Solitude is a matter of individual perception; even small areas of natural forest environments can provide a feeling of remoteness for some people. River and stream corridors (M.A. 2.4) provide 14,000 acres of land that offer recreational opportunities along with a degree of solitude. Some special areas, as well as other lands, provide varying degrees of solitude. These areas, along with wilderness and backcountry, constitute the national forest's available "remote recreation habitat." These are places where people can come, for even a brief period, to retreat from the modern world into a less disturbed natural habitat.

Management area 2.8 (general forest, provides young forest, mostly by uneven-aged methods, forest openings, timber products, minerals) harbors the greatest variety of forest habitats on the national forest. This management area provides the best places for gathering forest products and the most varied areas to see wildflowers, butterflies, and a variety of plants and animals.

Existing developed recreation facilities in M.A. 7.1 continue to be intensively managed for public recreation.

The combination of management areas in the *Forest Plan* provides for undeveloped areas, backcountry areas, developed hiking and riding areas, developed recreation sites, and good hunting areas. Forest users are able to select the type of recreation environment that best fits their needs.

Off road vehicle (ORV) use

Under the existing Forest Plan, ORV use is precluded on the Hoosier. This issue has generated a great deal of interest and controversy. People do not agree. Some typical comments include:

- “I walk daily and I cannot get away from ORV noise. Where can we get natural quiet?”
- “Users would like to work with USDA-Forest Service and help implement a motorized vehicle plan that would not impact neighbors.”
- I’m opposed to ORV’s being on the Hoosier National Forest — tears up the land, causes erosion, destruction of plant life, noise spoils peace.”

We propose to maintain our current policy related to the 1987 Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Use Area decision for off-highway vehicles (including all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, and four-wheel-drive trucks). The major factor for the April 3, 1987 decision to not provide ORV use areas involved the concerns expressed by our neighbors. However, since we have had a great deal of interest in this decision we will assess the changes since 1987 to see if we need to change this policy.

Trail Guidance

People are interested in trail management. Many comments support multi-use trails, others comments support single use trails, others oppose the use of gravel, some support gravel. Some typical comments include:

- “... horses have their place, not always on the same trail. Hikers only trails are OK.”
- “Oppose multi-use trails.”
- “Oppose inadequate hiking trails.”
- “Agree with goals, but disagree on implementation. Need to educate all users on how to get along with multiple-use trails.”
- “Object to trail maintenance procedures. Do not want gravel roads—want trails. Perhaps close trails during wet season.”
- “More recreation trails responsibly maintained throughout forest.”
- “Trails—need to address natural areas and TES species so that trails do not impact.”
- “Minimize trails lost by adding trails when trails closed to protect TES etc.”
- “Acknowledge multi-use trails are not hiking trails. Use hikers to lay out trails.”
- “Increase trail system, to alleviate overuse of trails. Educate against discrimination in woods against users. (For example some are saying that equestrians support the placing of stone on trails [they do not].”
- “Consider hiring trail maintenance people who care about trails. (Concerned about rock and stone surfacing).”

We propose to keep the trail guidance established by the 1994 plan amendment. We amended the Hoosier National Forest *Plan* on June 23, 1994, to provide updated management direction for trails. The previous plan direction was not effective in reducing resource degradation and user conflict. Demand for trails had increased over the years and exceeded the limited land base of the National Forest System in Indiana. User-made routes sometimes followed abandoned public roads or old administrative roads and also went cross-country through the forest. These routes totaled more than 500 miles and were often in poor locations and not maintained to an acceptable standard.

Public involvement included opportunity area planning in the 1980's, citizens work group using the Limits of Acceptable Change process, open house meetings, mailings of draft documents to concerned citizens, and analysis of written comments received in response to our mailings. Changes in the 1994 amendment included setting trail density limits by management area, setting access policy for adjacent landowners and special-use trails, and requiring both horses and mountain bike use to be on designated trails. The USDA Forest Service prepared an environmental assessment and solicited extensive public involvement in preparing the amendment. Since the 1994 plan amendment over \$600,000 has been invested in trail improvements.

However, after reviewing recent comments on the trail issue, we see a need to review our trail maintenance practices. Responses from the August 30, 1999 mailing, public meetings held in the fall of 1999, and personal contacts indicate concerns with trail maintenance practices such as trail hardening with gravel. We propose to address these important issues outside of plan revision, as they are not strategic plan issues but operational issues. We are working on techniques to measure trail use. We are monitoring trail conditions. We are working with user groups to meet their desires while protecting the resources. For example, the Hoosier National Forest hosted an International Mountain Bike Association trail management workshop in May 1999 to become more aware of trail maintenance practices that are compatible with mountain bike use. Engineering and recreational staff attended a National Symposium on Horse Trails in Forest Ecosystems in October 1998.

We held three public workshops in the fall (October 7, October 14, and November 4, 2000) to involve the public in reviewing our trails and maintenance in the field; to have a symposium on trails utilizing experts from other areas and agencies; and to review what we have learned from the field trip and symposium. After further public involvement the lessons learned shall be used to adjust policy, strategies, and practices to improve resource protection and provide satisfactory recreational experiences. However, if issues related to the trail plan raise concerns with *Forest Plan* guidance then we would consider changing the *Forest Plan* trail guidance during forest plan revision.

Neither the Forest Service nor the public identified a critical need to change the overall recreation program or management area allocations to recreation on the national forest. Therefore, the revised plan would generally carry forward existing allocations for developed recreation (Management Area 7.1) and backcountry (mostly Management Area 6.2 and 6.4).

D. Roadless Area Inventory and Evaluation

Proposal Summary: The forest roadless inventory will be updated consistent with Forest Service policy. The management of roadless areas not recommended for wilderness will be reconsidered.

People are interested in the roadless inventory; however, disagreement on the value of roadless area is common. Some typical comments include:

- “I support designation of additional wilderness areas e.g., Mogan Ridge.”
- Our group “opposes additional wilderness (both congressionally designated or administrative).”
- “Roadless areas—should not include existing trails, ways, and historic roads.”

We will prepare a roadless area inventory of all areas of the national forest that meet Forest Service roadless criteria. While we do not propose any areas for recommendation as wilderness based on current information, we will evaluate all roadless areas on the forest as part of the planning process and determine if any should be recommended.

In 1978, the Secretary of Agriculture listed three roadless areas in the Hoosier National Forest: Grubb Ridge, Cope Hollow, and Mogan Ridge. In 1982, Congress designated the Charles C. Deam Wilderness in two units separated by the Tower Ridge Road. Cope Hollow is the southern unit. Grubb Ridge and Terrill Ridge make up the northern unit. We currently manage Mogan Ridge for backcountry recreation under Management Area 6.4 (general forest, preservation, limited access, restoration and maintenance of plant communities). Guidance allows us to maintain forest openings and restoration of other plant communities. Although closed to public motorized vehicles most of the year, we open the main east-west gravel road in Mogan Ridge during fall deer hunting seasons for purposes of managing deer populations.

Roadless NOI

Proposal Summary: Proposed new regulations to protect certain roadless areas have been released by USDA Forest Service. The forest will follow the national framework to implement roadless areas initiative.

On May 10, 2000, the USDA Forest Service proposed new regulations to protect certain roadless areas within the National Forest System. The proposed rule would generally prohibit new road construction or reconstruction in the unroaded portions of inventoried roadless areas⁴ on National Forest System lands. This would affect the management of the Mogan Ridge Area. In addition to the prohibitions on new road building and reconstruction in unroaded portions of inventoried roadless areas, the proposal would also establish procedures for use during the forest plan revision process requiring local managers to:

- Evaluate the quality and importance of roadless characteristics
- Determine whether and how to protect roadless characteristics in the context of multiple-use objectives.

We would use the procedures and further public involvement as part of the forest plan revision process to make future decisions about what activities, such as recreation or timber harvest, would be appropriate in inventoried roadless and other unroaded areas.⁵

⁴ Inventoried Roadless Area: Undeveloped areas typically exceeding 5,000 acres that met the minimum criteria for wilderness consideration under the Wilderness Act and that were inventoried during the Forest Service's Roadless Area Review and Evaluation (RARE II) process, subsequent assessments, or forest planning. (Mogan Ridge is the only Hoosier National Forest Area affected.)

⁵ Unroaded area. Any area, without the presence of a classified road, of a size and configuration sufficient to protect the inherent characteristics associated with its unroaded condition.

E. Wild and Scenic, and Recreational River Recommendations

Proposal Summary: The forest does not plan to make a suitability determination during forest plan revision.

In 1991, USDA Forest Service determined the eligibility and potential classification of the Little Blue River and the Lost River. The 1991 *Forest Plan* provides full protection of the values for which we found the rivers eligible (*Forest Plan* Appendix N). To provide protection to these rivers we provided guidance in Management Area 2.4 (major streams and lakes, preservation, some maintenance and restoration of ecosystems) and forest-wide guidance. Eligibility of the rivers will be reviewed during the planning process. If conditions remain essentially the same since 1991 we will continue to manage the river under the management area 2.4 guidelines. If significant changes have occurred to the rivers since 1991, eligibility will be addressed in the *Forest Plan*.

Successful efforts to include river corridors in the Wild, Scenic, and Recreational River System depend upon local grass roots support. The USDA Forest Service is willing to participate in local corridor discussions. We would not be making a suitability⁶determination during the forest plan revision process.

F. Scenery Management

Proposal Summary: The Scenery Management System will replace the Visual Quality Objectives direction in the current *Forest Plan*.

Both monitoring and evaluation and public comment have indicated no overriding need to change the current process of managing for visual quality. However, the new Forest Service National Scenery Management System has been developed. We propose to conduct the inventory and social analysis needed to update the revised plan to reflect the new system.

3. Other Items

In many south-central Indiana communities, people expect important products from managed forests such as: timber for wood products, minerals, and game species for hunting. People also value the opportunities forests provide for enjoying recreation, solitude, and scenic beauty. The Hoosier National Forest is integral to the sense of place for communities across south-central Indiana. When making decisions in the revised plan, we would examine economic and social impacts to local communities and at a broader regional level, as well as biological impacts.

We are committed to participate in statewide land management planning and the use of State watershed assessment results and coordination efforts, such as best management practices

⁶ The appropriateness of applying certain resource management practices to a particular area of land, as determined by an analysis of the economic and environmental consequences and the alternative uses foregone.

development for forest management. We would consider technical guidelines developed through these processes when developing guidance.

We also propose to make several minor changes to *Forest Plan* guidance such as the heritage section to comply with recent laws and regulations, the fire section to incorporate the 1994 national fire review, and update the monitoring plan to above proposed changes. We may identify other changes in guidance as important to address the revision topics identified above.

C. Topics Not Addressed In This Forest Plan Revision Process

The following topics are beyond the scope of the *Forest Plan*:

- The *Forest Plan* decisions do not change treaties, laws, rights, or regulations.
- The *Forest Plan* decisions only apply to National Forest System lands. We will make no decisions regarding management or use of privately owned lands or reserved and outstanding mineral estates. However, guidance in the revised plan may affect exercise of private mineral rights, depending upon terms and conditions of property deeds.
- Many people hold special use permits for various uses such as utility corridors. The revised *Forest Plan* would not re-visit decisions on existing permits. As soon as practicable after approval of the plan, the Forest Supervisor shall ensure that subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding and future permits, contracts, cooperative agreements, and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the plan.

Consideration of comments made on topics not identified for revision

We will forward public comments received on topics that we do not address in the revised *Forest Plan* to the responsible Hoosier National Forest program manager. Program managers will consider the comments when they develop information and proposals related to those topics. Such proposals may result in future plan amendments, changes in implementation, changes in program emphasis, or various other means of addressing the concerns related to a particular topic. Program managers would carry out proposals as budget priorities allow. For instance, we have forwarded comments about visitors trespassing on private land to the recreation program manager. Some recent parking lot improvements are the result of such comments.

We focused our proposed revision effort on information and direction representing the greatest need for change. We propose to address those other topics outside of the *Forest Plan* revision process. However, we will adapt our revision effort to changing conditions and issues. We propose that the current plan is adequate in the following areas:

1. Special Areas Protection
2. Management of the Charles C. Deam Wilderness
3. Land Adjustment Strategy
4. Special Use Guidance
5. Road Management Guidance
6. Minerals Management

1. Special Areas Protection

Designated Special Areas include unique or unusual ecological, botanical, zoological, geological, scenic, historic, prehistoric, and other areas that merit special recognition and management. We mailed the Predecisional EA for Plan Amendment 5, Special Areas, to the public the first week in March. This amendment proposes to modify boundaries of existing Management Area 8.2 (Special Areas), make a final recommendation on Management Area 9.2 (Proposed Special Areas), and propose four new areas identified since the signing of the 1991 *Forest Plan* for Special Area status (new special areas). These special areas and proposed special areas are located throughout the Hoosier National Forest on about 15,900 acres of Federal land. We are maintaining the unique features within the special areas; the revised plan will continue to maintain these special areas as decided in Plan Amendment 5.

2. Management of the Charles C. Deam Wilderness

The 12,953-acre Charles C. Deam Wilderness (CCDW) borders the south shore of Lake Monroe. Congress designated it December 22, 1982; it is managed for wilderness values. The area that is now the Charles C. Deam Wilderness was first settled in 1826 by the Todd family. It was one of the last areas in Indiana to be settled because the steep hills and narrow ridgetops were hard to clear and the poor soil made farming a marginal proposition. The settlers cleared the land, built fences, and piled up long rows of rocks from their fields. Today you can see the remnants of their work. Though now closed, most of the 57 miles of roads mapped at the turn of the century in the wilderness are still visible on ridgetops. The ability of the land to heal is brought home when you realize less than 50 years ago this same area had 81 small farms and every ridgetop was planted in corn or hayfields. Photos from 1939 show that about 33 percent was cultivated farmland; about 26 percent was open/grazed forest (grazed by hogs, cattle, and horses), and the rest closed-canopy forests (41 percent).

Today the CCDW is in Management Area 5.1. The desired condition is “extensive areas of old-growth vegetation. Stands will be characterized by large, mature or overmature trees. Some younger trees and openings occur as a result of natural processes. ... The size of the area is sufficient to allow users to be reasonably isolated from the sights and sounds of people.”

Guidance includes: “Natural succession is the dominant process in the Charles C. Deam Wilderness. Vegetation manipulation does not occur generally except for trail maintenance, maintenance of cemeteries and the roads to them, including the Terrill Ridge Road, and activities on private land. ... Pesticides will be used only when necessary to prevent the loss of significant aspects of the designated wilderness.” Current management activities include, trail maintenance; cemetery access maintenance, removal of old fences and trash; and hand pulling of garlic mustard (an invasive non-native species).

The *Forest Plan* guidance for the transportation system states: "adjacent to the wilderness, Tower Ridge Road and Hunter Creek Road will remain open" (USDA Forest Service 1991c, p. 2-38). Many people become confused as to why Congress would permit a road and motorized travel through the wilderness. When the USDA Forest Service recommended wilderness legislation to Congress in 1982, the recommendation was for two separate wilderness areas separated by a transportation corridor. Subsequently Congress designated one area, the Charles C. Deam Wilderness, a single wilderness area including two units separated by the Tower Ridge Road. This road will remain open to the public with the wilderness units on either side. In order to allow maintenance of the road, Congress set the wilderness boundary back 100 feet north and south of the centerline of the road.

We amended the *Forest Plan* on June 23, 1994, to provide updated management direction for the Charles C. Deam Wilderness (CCDW). The overuse and competing demands within the CCDW threatened the character and values of the wilderness. Public involvement included opportunity area planning in the 1980's, a citizen work group using the Limits of Acceptable Change process, open house meetings, mailings of draft documents to concerned citizens, and analysis of written comments received in response to our mailings. Changes in Management Area 5.1(CCDW) guidance included setting an upper limit for the number of miles of trails located to minimize soil and water impacts. The amendment also provided for an overall reduction in numbers of users of the CCDW by limiting parking to designated trailheads, and limiting group size. On the ground we also reduced the number of trailheads and reduced the capacity of the Blackwell Horsecamp by fencing and restrictions on camping (adjacent to CCDW).

The USDA Forest Service prepared an environmental assessment and solicited extensive public involvement in preparing this amendment. Our monitoring and evaluation reports have not indicated a need to change and the public has not expressed any desire to change wilderness management. The wilderness implementation schedule, forest orders, and search and rescue plan will be reviewed annually but will not be included in the forest plan revision. As a result, we would not revisit this decision but would carry forward the 1994 plan amendment as management direction for the CCDW. However, if issues related to population viability or other issues affect habitat guidance within the CCDW, then we would consider changing the guidance for the CCDW.

3. Land Adjustment Strategy

The *Forest Plan* currently contains direction to consolidate national forest ownership when opportunities allow and to trade small isolated parcels (*Forest Plan* Appendix E). "Lands to be exchanged by the national forest will be analyzed on a case-by-case basis." We will not trade away unique resources. Isolated tracts of 160 acres or less will normally be exchanged. However, the *Plan* did not preclude retaining these tracts. Each land exchange is analyzed and decided through project level environmental analysis.

The land adjustment strategy is working well. We have congressional support for land acquisition. Since 1991, we have acquired 9,625 acres through purchase, exchange, and donation; we acquired by purchase 8,803 acres (97 cases), we acquired by exchange 763 acres (8 cases), and we acquired by donation 58 acres (2 cases). Many of these tracts have unique resources that are protected by being part of the National Forest System. Because the strategy is working, we have no changes proposed. However, we will adapt to changing conditions and issues.

4. Special Use Guidance

Forest-wide commercial and private uses of National Forest System lands include recreation special uses, such as outfitter and guide, recreation events, horse rides, and bike-a-thons; search and rescue training, special use trails, special use roads, and utility corridors. The issue related to these special uses is one of defining which uses are appropriate, as well as how much use is appropriate, on National Forest System lands. We resolved this issue in the 1991 and 1994 amendments.

Requests for outfitter guide permits are evaluated and considered on a case-by-case basis outside of the Charles C. Deam Wilderness on the Hoosier National Forest. Since 1991, we have had only two applications for outfitter guide permits and both were approved. There is little market for outfitter guide permits in Indiana. With the scattered National Forest System lands, hundreds of miles of

public roads, and 239 miles of designated trails in the 196,000-acre national forest, there is little opportunity to get lost or get caught in severe weather where a guide would be needed.

The June 23, 1994 amendment prohibited outfitter/guide permits in the Wilderness. Since overuse has been identified as a major problem in the CCDW, prohibiting outfitter/guide permits was seen as one methods of helping to reduce use. Outfitter guides would only serve to attract more users to the area. Also, unlike western wildernesses where the sheer size and harsh environment might make such a service more necessary, the CCDW offers little opportunity to become lost, get caught in a blizzard, or other circumstances where a guide would be needed.

5. Road Management Guidance

Construction of new forest system roads has been minimal over the last decade and we expect it to continue to be minimal during the next planning period. As roads age, however, reconstruction will become necessary to restore road surfaces and retain drainage structures. The current plan permits road reconstruction and the revised plan would permit it.

A proposed National Forest System Road Management Policy was released in draft on March 3, 2000 and is scheduled to be final by December 1, 2000. The policy will contain direction on analysis standards for assessing the need for new road construction; for evaluating the existing road network for determining what roads are necessary for future management; and for identifying what roads can be decommissioned. Road assessments and site-specific road management decisions would not be resolved within the revised *Forest Plan*. National forest staff would continue to work on inventories and opportunities for needed and unneeded roads. The forest plan revision will set the goals and objectives for roads on the forest. This road policy will provide a methodology for implementing those goals and objectives.

6. Minerals Management

The existing policy of protecting surface resources in managing federal minerals on National Forest System land is working. Mineral resources are available for exploration and development only on selected areas of the forest. We allow exploration and development of gypsum only in Management Area 2.8 (general forest, provides young forest, mostly by uneven-aged methods, forest openings, timber products, minerals) in the Lost River unit. This would involve a minimal amount of core-drilling and occasional airshafts. If private parties on adjacent land develop oil and gas wells that may drain federal minerals, we may consider leasing and exploration in order to protect federal interests. These instances are expected to be rare and will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

D. Developing Alternatives for the Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The USDA Forest Service will develop several revision alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS). These alternatives will be different ways to address the need for change based on the major revision issues discussed above. We will invite the public to participate in facilitated meetings to help develop alternatives. People may participate by attending workshops, attending open houses, writing letters, and sending e-mail.

We will evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives and explain reasons for eliminating some alternatives from detailed study. A “no-action alternative” is required, meaning that management would continue under the existing *Forest Plan*. In describing alternatives, we will define desired settings, levels of use, and resource conditions. We will estimate resource outputs based upon achieving desired conditions.

There are a number of potential alternative elements. We will analyze some of these elements in detail. A short description of the recreation, timber, roadless, and wildlife elements follow.

The alternatives will display different mixes of recreation opportunities and experiences. The mix will vary by the objectives of the particular alternative, though each alternative will contain some of each of the currently provided opportunities and experiences. For example, the forest would work with ORV and other user groups to develop alternatives that would address a range of ORV opportunities. Within these alternatives, any ORV use would be restricted to designated trails.

We will examine alternatives that address concerns for less timber harvest, for greater timber harvest, and meeting currently planned harvest levels. By examining and comparing alternatives, we can explore the tradeoffs involved with timber harvest and methods of harvest, and develop a level of understanding with the public on those tradeoffs.

Management of roadless areas will vary by the objectives of any particular alternative, physical criteria for evaluating each individual roadless area (for example, size, shape, facilities, activities, or cultural evidence in the area) and public input. The proposed roadless conservation rule may limit the range of alternative management strategies for inventoried roadless areas, in that no management prescription could construct or reconstruct roads. In addition, the alternatives will incorporate a range of wilderness recommendations from no additional to the maximum suitable.

The alternatives will display different mixes of wildlife habitats across the forest. The mix will vary by the objectives of the particular alternative, though each alternative will provide the habitat necessary to provide for population viability of plant and animal species within the capability of the Hoosier National Forest. Results of this process will form the basis for alternatives to be included in the DEIS. The DEIS will (1) display and compare alternative ways of managing National Forest System lands; and (2) outline the physical, biological, social, and economic effects of each alternative.

E. Inviting Public Involvement

Working with others in revising the *Forest Plan*

The USDA Forest Service will seek public participation in the revision effort. This dialogue will include (1) establishing multiple opportunities for the public to generate ideas, concerns, and alternatives, (2) keeping the public informed about the work as it progresses; and (3) listening to and giving consideration to ideas and suggestions offered by the public (both in writing and in person). We anticipate many group meetings either based on specific topics or on developing alternatives. We anticipate having people self-select from a menu of opportunities we will make available to them through direct mailing, news media, and the website.

This dialogue will occur with all interested and affected parties and other federal, state, county, and local governments and agencies. We will use the public input we receive throughout the revision process.

We will work collaboratively with other public land managers. Many forest management issues cross-administrative boundaries and we recognize a larger scale than the Hoosier National Forest needs to be considered. However, the revised plan will only contain direction for National Forest System lands.

Opportunities for public involvement

The Hoosier National Forest is maintaining a mailing list of the names and addresses of individuals and groups who have expressed an interest in revising the *Forest Plan*. We will use this list to keep people informed about the status of the revision effort, as well as about upcoming public involvement activities. In addition, we have offered and will continue to offer to participate in meetings of established groups - civic organizations, clubs, etc. We will also issue news releases to keep people informed throughout the plan revision process and will update our website (www.fs.fed.us/r9/hoosier). The website is also a way for people to submit comments specifically about plan revision. We may establish a planning hotline depending on need.

To be included on the mailing list, call or write:

**Forest Plan Revision
Hoosier National Forest
811 Constitution Avenue
Bedford, IN 47421**

**812-275-5987
TDD (812-275-7817)**

We will encourage public participation in the environmental analysis and decision-making process.

Tentative date	Step	Public involvement
Fall 2000	Notice of intent, proposal	60-day formal comment period, public meetings, written comments, website and e-mail
2001-2002	Alternative development, issue validation	Public workshops, collaborative meetings, written comments, website and e-mail
2002 - 2003	Proposed revised plan, draft environmental impact statement	Formal comment period, public meetings, written comments
2004	Final revised plan, final environmental impact statement and Record of Decision	Informational meetings to explain decision on final plan

Although the USDA Forest Service will be working with individuals, groups, landowners and other government agencies throughout the entire planning process, the three stages listed below will have the most intense public participation and comment opportunities.

Stage 1: Notice of Intent (NOI)

This Notice of Intent is based on the scoping work with the public, specialists and other agencies to define issues and determine those significant for revision. At the time of the publication of this NOI, we invite individuals to comment on this proposal, and to share concerns or raise issues related to this initial proposal.

In late **fall 2000**, we will host a series of public meetings to (1) establish multiple opportunities for the public to generate ideas, concerns, and alternatives, (2) present and clarify proposed changes to the *Forest Plan*; (3) explain how people can respond to this Notice of Intent; and (4) accept comments. To be most useful, please submit your comments on the Notice of Intent in writing by **January 3, 2001**.

Mail comments to:

**NOI – FP Revision
Hoosier National Forest
811 Constitution Avenue
Bedford, IN 47421**

Stage 2: Developing Alternatives

During this stage, we will work with the public at many meetings during **2001-2002** to develop a range of alternatives for addressing issues associated with the revision topics. It is in this stage that we anticipate the greatest number of ongoing collaborative meetings. Those who have already indicated their interest in the plan revision process will be sent a menu of opportunities to select from. Updates to that list will be mailed as necessary - as groups decide to have more or fewer meetings or as new groups wish to meet.

Stage 3: DEIS and Proposed Revised *Forest Plan*

The draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) will display and compare alternative ways of managing the Hoosier National Forest. The DEIS will also describe the physical, biological, social and economic effects of each alternative. The USDA Forest Service will identify a preferred alternative and a proposed revised *Forest Plan*. The DEIS and proposed revised plan are expected to be published in **2003**. The comment period on the draft environmental impact statement and proposed revised *Forest Plan* would be 90 days from the date the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency publishes the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register. We expect many meetings to review the DEIS and proposed revised plan with the public and several group meetings dealing with proposed changes. The format would be similar to that described in Stage 2 above.

F. Conclusion to the Revision Process

Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Revised *Forest Plan*

After the end of the comment period on the draft environmental impact statement, the Forest Service will review, consider, analyze, and respond to public comments in preparing the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) and revised *Forest Plan*. The Forest Service proposes to complete the FEIS in **2004**.

The responsible official will consider the comments, responses, and environmental consequences discussed in the final environmental impact statement, together with applicable laws, regulations, and policies, in making a decision and adopting the final revised *Forest Plan*. The responsible official will document the decision and reasons for the decision in the Record of Decision. That decision would be subject to appeal in accordance with federal regulations (36 CFR 217).

This revised *Forest Plan* will set the management direction for the Hoosier National Forest for the next 10-15 years.

The responsible official is Robert T. Jacobs, Regional Forester, Eastern Region, 310 W. Wisconsin Ave, Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53203.

/s/ Robert T. Jacobs