



Forest Plan Revision Has Started

After several years of waiting, we have started the formal process to revise the Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) for Mark Twain National Forest. On April 16, 2002 the Forest published, in the Federal Register, a Notice of Intent (NOI) to revise the Forest Plan.

The current Forest Plan is our starting point for the Forest Plan revision. We have planned and accomplished thousands of management activities since we began implementing the Forest Plan in 1986. Through our monitoring and evaluation of these activities, we have found that many of the decisions and direction in the Forest Plan still work well and do not need to be changed.

However, since our Forest Plan was approved in 1986 the condition of the Forest has changed due to management practices and natural events. A wealth of new information on ecosystem management, social changes, and analysis techniques is now available. There have also been changes in laws and regulations and in the demands for forest resources. We are eager to revise the Forest Plan to reflect these changed conditions and new information.

Throughout the revision process, we will focus on needed and feasible improvements to our current management. We want to fix those parts of the Forest Plan that are not working well, and leave the rest alone. It is important to remember that the revision is not the only time the Forest Plan can be changed. The Forest Plan is a dynamic document, and can be changed through amendments when needed. In fact, we have made several amendments in the past few years to update the Forest Plan.

Information for Plan revision was gathered from our own employees, other government agencies, university studies and the public. Part of the information we received from the public was from a series of meetings we called "What's Happening on Mark Twain National Forest." We held four meetings across the Forest with almost 200 people attending. One presentation at these meeting was by Laura Watts, our forest planner, addressing Forest Plan revision. The information gathered was evaluated and developed into the Assessment of the Need For Change for the Mark Twain National Forest Land and Resource

Management Plan and Notice to Revise the Forest Plan (Need for Change). Both the Need for Change and the Notice of Intent are available on our web site at: www.fs.fed.us/r9/marktwain/ or by contacting Laura Watts at (573) 341-7471.

A Need for Change

In the Need for Change, these five topics were identified for plan revision.

1. Vegetation And Timber Management
2. Ecological Sustainability and Ecosystem Health
3. Fire Management
4. Management Areas
5. Riparian Areas and Water Quality

Changes in these areas could affect multiple resources or result in significant changes in the Forest Plan. The revision will also address some changes that are narrow in scope and which would not affect other areas. There are also several editorial corrections and clarification that need to be made in the Forest Plan.

What is a National Forest?

A national forest is just what the name says. It is a forest that is owned by the citizens of the United States and managed for the good of the citizens of the United States. A national forest is different from national parks or state forests. National parks were created to protect unique natural areas and historic sites. National forests are managed for multiple uses such as watershed protection, timber production, minerals, water and air quality, wildlife habitat and recreation. In Missouri, state forests are managed for many of the same uses as national forests, but are managed from a state perspective.

When we look at managing Mark Twain National Forest we have to look at the management from several viewpoints. With 155 national forests covering over 192 million acres across the United States, we have to define the role the 1.5 million acres making up the Mark Twain National Forest fills from a national, regional and local perspective.

Using federal laws and regulations as a starting point, the Forest Plan is used to further define what role the Mark Twain National Forest can fill in meeting the needs of the public on these three levels. This means working with State agencies and county and local governments and the public to define what resources the Forest has to meet the public's needs.

What Does a Forest Plan Do?

As we start into Plan revision we must remember what a Forest Plan does and doesn't do. A Forest Plan covers topics on a broad philosophical level such as under what conditions an activity can take place on national forest lands. A Forest Plan does not address site-specific issues such as the location of a road or if a road needs to be upgraded or eliminated. Site-specific types of decisions are made at a different level of planning so the decisions can be more responsive to the current need.

We feel it is important to acknowledge up front that not all problems can be solved, nor is complete agreement on issues possible. We do believe that it is possible to improve management of the Mark Twain National Forest in ways that most people can accept, and our focus throughout the revision process will be on making needed and feasible improvements to the Forest Plan.

You Can Help

The publication of the Notice of Intent is our notice to the public and other government agencies that we have started the process of developing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for revising the Forest Plan. We estimate that it will take four years to complete the EIS and revised Forest Plan. During this time the public will have lots of opportunities to be involved in the process.

The Forest Service believes that to produce the best Forest Plan revision it is important to involve the public at the earliest stage and throughout the process. At this time, we are asking you to review the NOI and Need for Change and send us your comments.

Comments should focus on: the proposal for revising the Forest Plan, possible alternatives for addressing issues associated with the proposal, potential environmental effects that should be included in the analysis, and any possible impacts associated with the proposal based on an individual's civil rights. Comments should be as specific as possible.

Your comments on the Notice of Intent and Need for Change need to be submitted in writing by August 2, 2002. Comments should be mailed to: NOI-Forest Plan Revision, 401 Fairgrounds Road, Rolla, MO 65401. Electronic mail should include "Forest Plan Revision" in the subject line and be sent to: mailroom_r9_marktwain@fs.fed.us

We have planned four meetings in the month of June. These public meeting will give you a chance to meet with the Forest Planning staff and other resource specialists, to become more familiar with the planning process, and let us know your thoughts about plan revision. Meetings are planned for:

June 6, 2002, 7:00 – 8:30 PM
West Plains Civic Center
110 St. Louis, West Plains, MO.

June 13, 2002 7:00 – 8:30 PM
Black River Coliseum
301 South 5th Street, Poplar Bluff, MO.

June 20, 2002, 7:00 – 8:30 PM
Farmington Civic Center
#2 Black Knight, Farmington, MO

June 27, 2002, 7:00 – 8:30 PM
Leinor Community Center
#1 Hurigan Drive, Columbia, MO.

If you plan on attending one of our meetings and have a special need such as signing or amplified hearing device contact: Charles Gill (573) 341-7406 TTY (573) 341-7453.

If you have a group that would like to learn more about the Plan revision, please let us know. We will be glad to work with you to arrange for a presentation or meeting.