

Wayne National Forest Monitoring and Evaluation Report Fiscal Years 1999, 2000 and 2001

Executive Summary

This document measures the effects on the land resulting from the management activities and impacts of human use on the Wayne National Forest. Monitoring and evaluating the prescriptions, practices, and standards and guidelines outlined in the Forest Plan against the actual impacts allows us to determine if we are meeting the identified Plan objectives.

We are committed to allowing people to enjoy the values and benefits the Forest provides through responsible resource management tailored to meet public desires. Budgets for any given year determine the projects implemented and may impact the level of monitoring achieved. Within the constraints of budget this document discusses the monitoring program implemented on the Wayne National Forest in 1999, 2000, and 2001. Monitoring and evaluation of forest plans is required by the National Forest Management Act [36 CFR 219.12(k)].

Many of the projections made in the Forest Plan, and the prescriptions recommended, were contingent on predicted funding levels. In each of the three years covered by this report, funding fell short of projected. Earmark funding has allowed the Forest to accomplish a number of items which otherwise would not have been possible such as treatment of noxious weeds, decommissioning of specific roads, inventory of coal mines in the Forest, recreation site planning, land acquisition, and funding clean water initiatives. In fiscal year 2000 and 2001, the major part of the Earmarks (\$1 million each year) was specifically directed to starting the cleanup of acid mine drainage problems on the Forest.

Several of the practices that were cornerstones of management at the time the Forest Plan was released, have changed dramatically in the ensuing years. Timber harvesting and its associated practices were integral parts of the Plan and its objectives. There were no timber sales sold or conducted during FY 1999 - 2001.

The lack of timber harvesting has resulted in a decline of forestland in the 0 - 10 year age class (approximately 3 percent), far below the 8-13 percent objective of the forest plan. This results in a shortage of early successional habitat for wildlife as well as "edge" and other wildlife habitats prescribed by the forest plan.

Other types of open-land on the forest have generally been retained (approximately 5 percent) and meet the 2-6 percent objectives of the forest plan. However, during the years of 1999 -2001 no new wildlife openings were created though existing openings were maintained by mowing.

Wildlife species were evaluated in FY 99 to update the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list. Currently there are 18 wildlife species and 11 plant species on the Regional Forester's Sensitive Species list for the Wayne National Forest.

Since the Forest Plan's release it has also become apparent that some MIS species were not good choices for monitoring. For example, the Virginia rail is an extremely rare bird in southeast Ohio and is therefore a very poor choice for an MIS. The two frogs are also rather poor choices because the western chorus frog is very rare and has a call that is indistinguishable from the upland chorus frog, and the wood frog calls only briefly in the early spring with a weak call heard only a short distance. Neither frog is detected very often on the forest. Preliminary thought is now being given to better species to represent different ecosystems in monitoring projects.

In 1999 and 2000, a comprehensive fish community inventory was conducted in three 5th level watersheds within the Wayne National Forest. The purpose of the inventory was to document the distribution of all fishes across the three watersheds and to determine the existing biological health of streams in the watersheds. Ten of the eleven management indicator species were collected.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service has not identified any Wayne National Forest lands as critical habitat for any of the threatened or endangered species on the forest. In FY 1999 the Forest started the process of amending the Forest Plan based on newly identified Threatened and Endangered Species. In FY 2000, the Forest began Formal Consultation with US Fish and Wildlife Service. A contract was initiated to prepare a Biological Assessment (BA) for the Forest Plan, addressing three federally listed terrestrial animals, two federally listed aquatic animals, and four federally listed plants. The contract was completed, and the final Biological Opinion was received from the US Fish and Wildlife Service in September 2001. Recommendations from this document will be used in a proposed Forest Plan amendment.

Recreation changes to those predicted in the Forest Plan have also occurred. Reconstruction began in FY 2001 on the dam at Lake Vesuvius. This reconstruction has resulted in the closing of a major portion of the recreation sites at the Lake Vesuvius Recreation Area for FY 2001 and FY 2002. Though the Plan predicted on-going construction of new trails, there were no new trails constructed or designated during FY 1999-2001. Maintenance is occurring, but repairs are not always completed within 90 days, and standards are not always met. The Plan's direction for parking area capacity and trail density have not been met.

With the tangled history of mining in southeastern Ohio, water quality issues continue to be of significant concern. Abandoned mine inventories were conducted during this time frame to further identify the extent of the program and prioritize efforts.

Funding is received from the Ohio Council on Un-reclaimed Strip Mines (Ohio DNR) to restore water quality in some areas. Several techniques have been used, and each is carefully monitored to determine relative successes of various efforts. Funding has also come from OSM, Appalachian Clean Streams Initiative to clean up gob piles left after past mining. Several partnerships have been developed to capitalize on state of the art research, local funds and interest, and training opportunities. A local grass-roots group known as the Monday Creek Restoration Project, have been of tremendous help in garnering support and dollars to fund several projects.

The Pine Creek Watershed Analysis was completed in June 2001. The baseline information is expected to be directly relevant and useful in project planning, NEPA analysis, and other analyses required to implement projects by the Forest Service. The analysis of the Little Muskingum watershed is currently underway and is expected to be completed March 31, 2002.

Monitoring and evaluation shows us whether our programs are effective. It confirms or questions if our practices are environmentally sound and provide benefit to people. It allows us to identify our deficiencies so that we can adjust course. During the 1999-2001 period, the new information on Threatened and Endangered species on the Forest has prompted a proposed Forest Plan amendment.