



ALASKA

June 11, 2007

AMERICAN SAMOA

United States Forest Service
Ecosystem Management Coordination Staff

ARIZONA

CALIFORNIA

COLORADO

Re: Scoping Comments for 2005 Planning Rule EIS

COMMONWEALTH
OF THE NORTHERN
MARIANA ISLANDS

The Council of Western State Foresters (Council) is comprised of the seventeen State Foresters and six Territorial Foresters in the West. The Council has a vested interest in the land management planning process for lands administered by the U.S. Forest Service: many of these lands border and/or surround State and private forests and constitute large areas of forest in the Western U.S.

FEDERATED STATES
OF MICRONESIA

GUAM

HAWAII

IDAHO

KANSAS

Although the Council of Western State Foresters does not agree with the court's order in *Citizens for Better Forestry et al. v. USDA*, we support the decision by the U.S. Forest Service to expedite the planning process by analyzing the 2005 Planning Rule under NEPA using an Environmental Impact Statement.

MONTANA

NEBRASKA

To that end, we suggest that the *procedural scope of the analysis* include:

NEVADA

NEW MEXICO

NORTH DAKOTA

OREGON

REPUBLIC OF THE
MARSHALL ISLANDS

REPUBLIC OF PALAU

SOUTH DAKOTA

UTAH

WASHINGTON

WYOMING

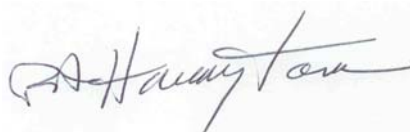
- No additional action alternatives should be analyzed. The 2005 Planning Rule (action alternative) and the no action alternative will provide the necessary diversity among possible federal actions that NEPA requires. Additionally, the NEPA statute reads that federal agencies analyze a “range of reasonable” alternatives, not that the agency analyze a “reasonable range” as the court’s have read; the later implying a *quantitative* test rather than the *qualitative* one as the law suggests.
- An expedited public involvement process for this analysis. Numerous avenues for the expression of opinions and ideas have been provided to the public, agencies, and interest groups to date via previous rulemaking processes.

The *substantive* aspects of the 2005 rule that should be carried forward into the analysis include:

- Strong guidance and mandate for collaborative planning and public involvement, regardless of the level of NEPA analysis done on LRMPs.
- Explicitly recognizing the role of scientific uncertainty and adaptive management in land management planning.
- Explicitly recognizing the three legged stool of sustainability and directing the FS to consider all three interdependent aspects of forest ecosystem management in conjunction: ecological, economic, and social.
- The elimination of voluminous, resource intensive, an unnecessary NEPA analysis at the “Plan” stage that does not directly alter outcomes on the ground. More appropriately, detailed analysis should be reserved for the project level where on-the-ground effects can be directly evaluated.
- Directing limited agency resources towards pre-decisional collaborative planning and public involvement rather than voluminous and technical effects analysis. Because land management plans are not site specific and are better described as documents based more on social values and judgments about land management, public involvement and collaboration are central to their success. Effects analysis under NEPA does NOT equal legitimate and useful public involvement and collaborative planning.
- Reductions to total elimination of prescriptive elements in Land Management Plans which are relics from a management era of the past. These include but are not limited to such constructs as Management Indicator Species, project level standards and guidelines, and strict land-use designations. This will allow for maximum flexibility when managing in concert with the uncertainty resulting from rapidly changing ecological (e.g. climate change), social (e.g. demographic changes), and economic (e.g. wood products industry changes) environments.

Lastly, we encourage the agency to disclose to the public the impact of failing to reduce time and resources spent on planning, which would be the result of either dropping or significantly changing the 2005 rule.

Thank you for consideration of our comments. We stand ready to clarify and support this scoping process.



Bob Harrington,
Montana State Forester and Chair of the Council of Western State Foresters