Chapter I

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Chapter I

Forestwide Desired Conditions

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains the Desired Condition statements for the various resources of the Rio Grande National Forest (RGNF). Desired Conditions are essentially the same as Goals and are a fundamental part of the Forestwide management direction. The Desired Condition statement is a description of the mosaic of land and resource conditions that Forest personnel are managing for, on the entire Forest, once the Forestwide Objectives are accomplished.

ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES

BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY	Habitat composition (including seral stage), structure, pattern (including connection), and disturbance frequencies similar to those that result from natural disturbances (insects, disease, and fire) are maintained to the extent possible, given legal and policy limitations, and the desired condition for the area. Viable populations of existing native and desired non-native vertebrate species are sustained with sufficient numbers of reproductive individuals. Native species are favored over non-native species. Habitats for federally listed Threatened, Endangered, and Proposed Endangered species and Regionally listed Sensitive species are protected, restored, and enhanced. Habitat on National Forest System lands is managed to help assure that those species whose viability is a concern survive throughout their range, and that habitat conditions improve or stabilize.
AIR RESOURCES	Air quality remains excellent. It is better than state and federal standards. Visibility distances are among the best in the country. Forest activities do not affect long-term changes or contribute to off-Forest problems.
TIMBER RESOURCES	The vegetative structure on the RGNF is capable of sustaining timber harvesting that supplies wood products for humankind while providing for the biological diversity of those forested areas. Harvest operations are designed to emulate smaller-scale disturbance events or processes.
RANGE	Vegetation is managed for a mixture of seral stages, with most of the rangelands in mid to high seral stages. The specific desired condition is identified in each allotment management plan.
FIRE	Fire's role in ecosystem dynamics is recognized and sponsored when and where it does not threaten human life, property, or resources needed to support long term

industries. Prescribed Natural Fire (PNF) is common in Management Area	Prescriptions 3.3 (Backcountry), 1.11-1.13 (Wilderness), 1.5 (Wild Rivers), and 2.2 (Research Natural Areas). The amount, arrangement, and continuity of live and/or dead material, which would contribute to fire spread (fuel profiles), are consistent with land uses and estimates of historic fire regimes.
NOXIOUS WEEDS	Noxious weeds are managed using an integrated pest management approach. All control methods, such as physical removal, prescribed fire, mechanical devices, biological treatments, or chemical applications, will be evaluated to reduce potential adverse effects on human health and the environment, and designed to meet Management Objectives.
WATER AND AQUATIC RESOURCES	Healthy watersheds operate in a dynamic equilibrium between extreme natural events. Surface-disturbing activities are managed so that floods, droughts, sediment loads, bank erosion, rills, gullies, and landslides are not markedly increased. Water quality is maintained or improved, with all stream segments having a near-reference-stream appearance. Water is suitable for municipal water supplies after normal treatment, including those using shallow alluvial aquifers. Chemical, physical, and biological attributes are improved and maintained in a healthy condition, ensuring future use. Stream health is maintained through natural processes without artificial controls. Streams have the expected range of habitat features, (for example, healthy riparian vegetation, stable banks, overwintering pools and healthy aquatic organisms). Riparian areas and floodplains are healthy, fully functioning ecosystems. Vegetation is diverse and is generally in a later-seral condition, to provide site stability. Fish thrive in Forest lakes and streams due to adequate habitat and water quality. Natural fish habitat is preferred and promoted over human-made habitat.
SOILS	Soils are maintained, or improved to healthy conditions, so that the ecosystems they support can flourish. Healthy soils and ecosystem sustainability will be assured if soil damages, such as erosion, displacement, compaction, scorching, and nutrient drains, are kept within allowable limits. Ecosystem management activities are harmonious with soil capabilities, potentials, and limitations. Soils may be periodically disturbed by management activities, but are restored and reclaimed to original potentials after activities have been completed. Where fire is used to perpetuate an ecosystem, it is done in a way that accomplishes resource objectives without unnecessarily risking or jeopardizing the site's ability to sustain ecosystems.

Healthy soils provide certain products such as

wood, forage for livestock and wildlife, water, recreation, minerals, and aesthetic benefits. These benefits can be continued for the long term, provided soil health remains within acceptable limits.

MINERALS

Mineral development is compatible with ecosystem capabilities and resource values. Balanced use and development of mineral resources are allowed, while protecting other resource values with stipulations, mitigation, and careful monitoring. Problems caused by historic mining are corrected.

SPECIAL FOREST PRODUCTS

Special forest products, such as firewood, building rock, herb and vegetable products, medicinal and pharmaceutical products, wild edible mushrooms, wild berries and fruit, landscaping products, craft products, and floral and greenery products, continue to be available from the Forest. Plants include trees, shrubs, water plants, forbs, grasses, mosses, lichens, and fungi. Plant parts that are used include leaves, boughs, bark, bulbs, corms, seeds, nuts, and fruits.

The gathering of such products depends on the sustainable limits of the resource. In addition, permits may be required for some of these products.

The RGNF recognizes the needs of people from the San Luis Valley and surrounding areas, and strives to meet their needs for forest and wood products, while protecting those resources for future generations.

SOCIAL RESOURCES

RESEARCH NATURAL AREAS	Several Research Natural Areas (RNAs) represent a variety of ecosystems in the Sangre de Cristo and San Juan Mountains. Ecosystems represented are typical plant associations found on the Forest, from the lowest elevations up through the alpine zone.
UNROADED AREAS	Maintain selected unroaded areas to offer nonmotorized - or limited motorized - recreation opportunities outside Wilderness. Ecologic composition, structure, pattern, and natural processes (fire, insects, disease, floods, etc.) are maintained, where feasible, to perpetuate biological diversity.
WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS	The "outstandingly remarkable" resources and values of selected rivers and their adjacent corridors are managed to protect their existing conditions for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.
WILDERNESS	Designated Wilderness is managed to: * retain its pristine character and natural processes, with minimal evidence of human influence; * offer opportunities for solitude; and * retain its ecological, scientific, educational, scenic, and historical values.
SPECIAL INTEREST AREAS	The Forest has several Special Interest Areas managed to protect or enhance their unique botanical, archeological, geological, or other values. Some areas offer interpretative sites and educational opportunities.
HERITAGE RESOURCES	Heritage resources supply information about the nation's heritage, offer quality recreation opportunities for the public, and contribute information that aids management of other Forest resources. Proactive consultation with American Indian peoples helps ensure the protection, preservation, and use of areas that are culturally important to them. Heritage resources are systematically evaluated and nominated for the National Register of Historic Places when they meet eligibility criteria. Heritage resources are protected from damage by project activities or vandalism through project design, specified protection measures, monitoring, and coordination.
RECREATION	Management of the Forest's recreation programs: * offers opportunities for motorized and nonmotorized recreation within appropriate settings; * is responsive to visitors' desires and increases service to the public; * maintains a broad range of quality developed recreation facilities; * features traditional and nontraditional dispersed-recreation opportunities;

* showcases Scenic Byways and landscape;	* expand our interpretative services; and * allows for current areas used as summer homes, resorts, and youth camps to continue to be managed as recreation special-use development areas.
SCENERY	The outstanding scenery of the RGNF is a major attraction for visitors. Management is focused on maintaining this high scenic quality, especially of areas seen from road and trail corridors, developed recreation sites, administrative sites, and towns and cities near the Forest. Encourage vegetative diversity and feature scenic attractions. Areas exceeding Unacceptably Low Scenic Integrity Levels are rehabilitated to a higher Scenic Integrity Objective.

ADMINISTRATIVE

GENERAL INFRASTRUCTURE	**Reservoirs and Ponds**: All dams on National Forest System lands are inspected to ensure public safety and comply with all appropriate laws and regulations. High- and moderate-hazard dams shall have current Emergency Preparedness Plans (EPPs). **Facilities**: Safe, accessible, functionally efficient, aesthetically pleasing, energy-efficient, and cost-effective buildings and related facilities (owned, operated, occupied, or authorized by the Forest Service) needed to achieve resource management objectives are maintained or constructed. **Drinking Water**: The Forest Service will test water at facilities under special-use permit, to ensure that human health is protected according to the *Safe Drinking Water Act.* **Waste Water**: Discharge or infiltration of pollutants from all wastewater disposal facilities owned and operated by the Forest Service, or that are under special-use permit from the Forest Service, do not create health hazards or nuisance conditions. This discharge does not alter the quality or characteristics of ground water and surface water beyond applicable federal or state water-quality and effluent-discharge standards. **Roads**: The road system continues to serve as adequate access for the public to enjoy the Forest. Road construction is limited, and the amount of reconstruction has decreased. Road closure is emphasized in some areas to enhance wildlife habitat, soil, and water resources.
REAL ESTATE	Develop a landownership pattern that improves our ability to meet Forest needs and public objectives. Land adjustments through purchases, exchanges, and donations include an array of unique plant and animal habitats, riparian areas, geologic features, heritage resources, and recreational opportunities.

HEALTH AND SAFETY	The Forest Service is responsive to public needs in emergencies, and supports and enters into cooperative agreements with local officials. Forest work programs are conducted within the guidelines of the *National Health and Safety Codes* and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.
RURAL DEVELOPMENT	Recognizing the economic dependency of rural communities on National Forest System lands and resources, Forest managers cooperate with local rural communities to develop sustainable enterprises that contribute to the general economic and social vitality of the area. Forest managers also give sufficient advance notice to rural communities about potential changes that may affect local economies. Forest managers cooperate with local, county, state, and American Indian partners to meet rural-community needs. Forest managers strive to improve rural conditions by helping to solve local problems in ways that enhance environmental quality according to existing authorities and laws.