



United States Department of Agriculture

Carson National Forest's Preliminary Need for Changing Management Direction of Its Existing 1986 Forest Plan

Carson National Forest



Forest Service

Carson
National Forest

May 2015

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue SW, Washington, DC 20250-9410, or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

Carson National Forest's Preliminary Need for Changing Management Direction of Its Existing 1986 Forest Plan

The Carson National Forest's current land and resource management plan (forest plan) is nearly 30 years old. The forest is in the process of developing a new plan that guides how the Carson National Forest is managed over the next 10 to 15 years. A [draft assessment report](#) provides information on the "state of the forest", including conditions, trends and risks to sustainability. Using the assessment, the forest's planning team has analyzed what needs to change in order to create sustainable resources, goods and services.

A need for change paints a picture of the strategic changes necessary to address issues identified by the assessment and present a vision for future management of the Carson NF. The overarching question to be answered in developing need for change statements is:

- ◆ What strategic current plan direction needs to be revised (added, modified, or deleted) to address the conditions, trends, and risks?

The preliminary need for change statements developed by the Carson NF will be presented to forest users and interested citizens for feedback and input. In June 2015, the forest will hold 13 public meetings at communities around the forest, as well as engage the public through the [Carson NF's website](#). The public will be presented with the key risk findings from the assessment and the preliminary need for change statements, and asked to provide new or alternative management solutions. Public input will help inform what parts of the forest plan need to be changed, which will ultimately be summarized in the *Federal Register*, when the forest publishes a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement to develop a revised forest plan later this summer. This announcement will convey the Carson NF's intent to develop forest plan alternatives based on identified needs for change and analyze their respective effects on the environment.

A forest plan provides broad, program-level direction for management of National Forest System lands and its resources. The purpose of a plan is to address the risks to sustainability of the resources, goods, and services the forest produces and to provide a vision for the future management of the forest. Future projects carry out the direction in a forest plan. The forest plan does not contain a commitment to select any specific project. Plan components are developed from the needs for change statements. The preliminary need for change statements are as follows.

Changes Needed Throughout the Plan

- There is a need for reducing the number, arrangement, boundaries, and plan direction related to the current plan management areas to reduce complexity and allow more flexibility for restoration and habitat treatments. Language should be more strategic than prescriptive, identifying quantifiable objectives and project standards and guidelines that will promote desired conditions.
- There is a need for better recognition of the Carson National Forest's role in contributing to local economies, including service-based sectors such as recreation and tourism, timber, and other multiple-use related activities and products.
- There is a need for allowing flexibility to manage for sustainable ecosystems instead of to a rigid reference, to allow for adaptive responses in the face of climate change.

- There is need for including plan direction to allow for flexibility and opportunity to adapt to fluctuations in forest budgets over the life of the plan in managing for sustainable ecosystems and providing services and benefits to meet public expectations. Establishing and incorporating partnership and volunteer opportunities should be considered as a management approach.
- There is a need for flexibility to manage landscapes in coordination with adjacent land managers and owners to manage the Carson National Forest in context of the larger landscape.
- There is a need for addressing potential climate change impacts such as drought, flooding, a longer fire season, and other extreme weather fluctuations. Resource area direction needs to focus on adaptive management, anticipate increased disturbance, maintain and restore resilient ecosystems, and provide for water conservation measures while planning for reduced supply.
- There is a need for removing components from the current plan that are redundant with existing laws, regulations, and FS policy. These will be incorporated in the revised plan by specific reference only.
- There is a need for establishing an active program of resource monitoring and responsive adaptive management.
- There is a need for considering the capability of local infrastructure, contractors, and markets when planning restoration treatments.

Ecological Changes

Vegetation

- There is a need for defining desired conditions regarding structure, composition, snags, and downed woody debris, as well as objectives, standards, and guidelines that will promote achievement of those desired conditions, support sustainability, and minimize risks to ecosystem integrity.
- There is a need for restoring and maintaining grass productivity, particularly native bunchgrass species, both in grassland and non-grassland Ecological Response Units. Limit woody species encroachment and invasive plant establishment.
- There is a need for controlling the introduction and spread of non-native invasive species, including direction that would minimize the spread of non-native plants that may increase as a result of management activities.
- There is a need for incorporating additional direction for an integrated resource approach to prescribed fire activity and flexibility for restoration and maintenance of ecosystems.
- There is a need for promoting natural and prescribed fire in all ecosystems while addressing public safety and health concerns.
- There is a need for promoting aspen regeneration through fire, other disturbance, and managing existing stands.
- There is a need for limiting and reversing woody species encroachment and infill (shrubs and trees into grasslands, and trees into shrublands).

Soils

- There is a need for promoting the maintenance and restoration of soil condition and function (hydrology, stability, nutrient cycling), particularly in lower elevation systems. There should be a focus on reducing the amount of exposed soil by restoring and maintaining sufficient vegetative cover including downed woody material.

Riparian

- There is a need for restoring and maintaining appropriate composition and amount of riparian vegetation.
- There is a need for describing the desired conditions of riparian ecosystems in the forest plan and establishing how riparian ecosystems will be monitored over time to determine if desired conditions are being met.
- There is a need for managing disturbance from activities and provide direction regarding riparian management around all lakes, perennial and intermittent streams, and open water wetlands.

Wetland

- There is a need for restoring and maintaining wetland condition and function.
- There is a need for describing the desired conditions of wetland ecosystems in the forest plan and establishing how wetland ecosystems will be monitored over time to determine if desired conditions are being met.

Water

- There is a need for managing for the protection, maintenance, and restoration of riparian vegetation and stream channel morphology and function on the Carson NF, to reduce sedimentation into streams.
- There is a need for providing plan direction to restore priority watersheds.
- There is a need for providing plan direction on the sustainable management of groundwater, springs, wetlands, riparian areas, perennial waters, and their interconnections.
- In anticipation of reduce water availability, there is a need for updating plan direction on managing for sustainable water supply for multiple uses (wildlife, livestock, recreation, mining) and public water supplies.
- There is a need for managing watersheds conditions to promote and maintain water retention.

Wildlife, Fish, and Plants

- There is a need for contributing to the recovery and conservation of federally recognized species, maintaining viable populations of the species of conservation concern, and maintaining common and abundant species within the plan area.
- There is a need for addressing the sustainability of habitat(s) for plant and animal species important to tribes and traditional communities.
- There is a need for providing terrestrial habitat connectivity for migration.
- There is a need for improving aquatic passage in streams where it is compromised. Direction should be included for restoring and expanding the range of native aquatic species and connectivity of fragmented populations.
- There is a need for retaining a diversity of management options including harvest, prescribed burning, and other vegetation management techniques to provide wildlife habitat for species that need a variety of forest habitats such as interior, edge, young, and old forest.
- There is a need for restoring and maintaining riparian vegetation in order to provide wildlife habitat.

Socio-Economic (Multiple Uses and Human Influences) Changes

Cultural and Historic Resources and Uses

- There is a need for updating direction on the stabilization and preservation of historic properties, including archeological sites, historic structures, and traditional cultural properties.
- There is a need for managing for Native American traditional cultural properties and sacred sites, and non-Native American traditional cultural properties, while conserving anonymity of such sites where appropriate.
- There is a need for managing for historic and contemporary cultural uses, including both economic and non-economic uses for tribes and for those traditional communities not considered under tribal relations (i.e., traditional Hispanic and Anglo communities).
- There is a need for addressing the alignment of heritage resources management objectives (the management of historic properties and landscapes, sacred sites, contemporary uses) with other resource management objectives (particularly but not limited to ecosystem restoration).
- There is a need for providing protections for historic and fire sensitive properties at risk of damage or destruction during catastrophic wildland fire to extent possible.

Areas of Tribal Importance

- There is a need for considering the opportunities for integrating forest restoration and tribal cultural needs and for working across boundaries in partnership with tribes to manage landscapes and address threats to adjacent tribal resources through the Tribal Forest Protection Act of 2004, to meet common objectives identified in tribe and pueblo land management plans, and to utilize an “all lands” approach to resources management.
- There is a need for finding creative ways of incorporating protections for sacred sites, as well as the importance of giving due consideration to accommodating and mitigating for the protection of sacred sites.
- There is a need for clarifying direction on design, location, installation, maintenance, and abandonment of towers, facilities, and alternative infrastructure within electronic communication sites, giving due consideration to the value and importance of high places (mountaintops and ridges) that may be identified as a sacred site or part of an important cultural landscape by tribes.

Timber and Special Forest Products

- There is a need for considering a variety of uses such as commercial, noncommercial, tribal, and land grant use, for the removal of miscellaneous forest products such as wood products, firewood, grass seed, plants (used for food, fuel, medicine, or traditional) or other materials.

Range and Grazing

- There is a need for management direction to the livestock grazing program that incorporates adaptive management toward ecosystem-based desired conditions, with particular emphasis on management in times of drought or other extreme weather-related events.

Recreation

- There is a need for promoting sustainable recreation management and ensure that recreation resources are integrated into all resource management decisions.
- There is a need for managing recreation activities that occur in areas sensitive to resource degradation or at risk due to high visitation.
- There is a need for managing the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail consistent with the Continental Divide National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan.
- There is a need for managing a sustainable trails program, while addressing user conflicts, resource damage, and user demands.
- There is a need for considering Recreation Opportunity Spectrum classifications across all programs areas.
- There is a need for addressing the management of snowmobiles/over-snow vehicle usage
- There is a need for updating management and facilitation of the recreation special uses program.
- There is a need for including more flexible scenery management that allows for activities to support ecological health and diverse wildlife habitats.
- There is a need for considering the Scenery Management System for managing scenic resources across all program areas.

Designated Areas

- There is a need for updating wilderness management direction in order to protect and enhance wilderness values and character.
- There is a need for identifying and evaluating potential additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System.
- There is a need to review the previous identification of eligible rivers for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

Infrastructure

- There is a need for ensuring the flexibility of management of infrastructure (roads, recreation and administrative facilities, range improvements, etc.).
- There is a need for managing road maintenance in watersheds identified as being impaired or at-risk.
- There is a need for managing for reclamation of non-system roads.

Land Status and Ownership, Use and Access

- There is a need for considering public and private easement needs.
- There is a need for providing contiguity of the land base and for reducing small unmanageable tracts of National Forest System lands.
- There is a need for prioritizing Boundary line survey and maintenance based on areas that are at higher risk for trespass and encroachment

Energy, Minerals and Special Uses

- There is a need for considering mining-related activities that are recreational in nature, for example gold panning.
- There is a need for clarifying the use of common mineral materials, such as personal use rock permits, commercial contracts, ceremonial use and free use permits.
- There is a need for providing for the anticipation of potential proposals for transmission corridors and renewable energy generation, including wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal, while protecting natural resources, heritage and sacred sites, tribal traditional activities, and scenery.