

From: Chief Tidwell

To: Forest Service Retirees

Re: Forest Service Announces Preferred Alternative for a New Planning Rule

I'm proud to announce the release of the final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for the planning rule. The PEIS identifies Modified Alternative A as the preferred alternative that best meets the purpose and need for a new rule, which is to create a planning process that will enable land managers to respond to social, economic, and ecological conditions consistently and efficiently. This alternative is responsive to public comment, Tribal input, and builds on years of Agency forest planning experience. A final rule and record of decision will be published in approximately 30 days.

I want to thank each of you for your participation in this effort. Your willingness to share your knowledge and experience has helped us to craft a preferred alternative that meets the need for a transparent, collaborative process that provides effective public participation in land management planning. I believe that the preferred alternative provides a planning process that is more efficient than the current rule while providing the same or greater level of resource protections. The preferred alternative also provides a way to move forward with updating plans to help get important work done on the national forests and grasslands. Once the Record of Decision is published, we'll begin implementing the final rule with the same commitment to collaboration and public involvement that guided the rulemaking process.

I invite you to continue to remain engaged and contribute to the planning process once the rule is finalized. We'll be developing directives to provide more specific direction on how to consistently implement the new rule, and you'll have an opportunity to comment on these before they're finalized. Most importantly, forests and grasslands will soon begin revising and amending their plans under the new rule, and I hope you will take the opportunity to be involved throughout those efforts.

We are also forming a Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) committee to continue the collaborative nature that has made this rule making process so successful. The FACA committee will work to make recommendations on our planning directives and how to incorporate lessons learned and best practices into the planning process. We are currently seeking nominations for committee membership; the 45-day nomination period closes February 21, 2012. Further information on the committee and its application process is available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/planningrule/faca>.

I encourage you to visit the Planning Rule website at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule> to review the PEIS, a video message from me, and some frequently asked questions.

Again, thank you for your continued commitment and participation in the management of the National Forest System.

Sincerely,

Tom Tidwell

Chief of the Forest Service