

Annual Forest Plan Monitoring Report for the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests

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Southwest Idaho Ecogroup

Intermountain Region, USDA Forest Service
1998-99

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I. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to provide a synopsis of major monitoring and evaluation activities that are being completed in support of forest plan revision for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup: Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests. These three forests have combined efforts in forest plan revision and have targeted December 2000 for release of the final EIS, forest plans, and records of decision. Release of a draft EIS and forest plans is scheduled for the spring of 2000. The revision process is using information from the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project (ICBEMP) science reports and related new scientific findings.

II. Conclusions from the Most Recent Forest Plan Monitoring Reports

The Boise and Sawtooth National Forests completed 5-year monitoring reports in 1996 while the Payette National Forest completed its 8-year monitoring report in 1996. The major findings, summarized below, provided the platform for combining efforts to complete forest plan revision as an ecogroup. The current forest plans were approved as follows:

Boise Forest Plan 1990;
Payette Forest Plan 1988; and
Sawtooth Forest Plan 1987.

Boise National Forest- Forest Supervisor Response to the 5-Year Monitoring Report (August 1996)

"After reviewing and considering the team's report, I am persuaded that the need for change is very compelling, given the impacts of wildfire, and new scientific information about aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. Therefore, I have decided to initiate revision of the Forest Plan immediately, with completion scheduled for the year 2000. I agree with the team that "a piecemeal" approach of completing individual amendments to address changed conditions is not an effective approach to responsible land and resource stewardship in light of limited personnel and funding. The need for change is compelling, but not urgent enough in the short-term to warrant changing Forest Plan direction before the planned revision is completed in the year 2000."

Payette National Forest 5-Year Monitoring Report (July 1996)

"The Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan was approved in 1988. Since that time, resource issues have changed somewhat and related community concerns in south central Idaho have heightened. For example: salmon runs have declined and spring/summer Chinook salmon have been listed under the Endangered Species Act; ecosystem management issues have increased; more species and their habitats are at risk; and communities face uncertainties about natural resource flows from public lands..... In addition to these issues, several sources have led us to believe we have a need to change our current management plans through revision. To summarize, these sources include:

- ◆ new issues identified;
- ◆ new information and knowledge gained through scientific research and effectiveness monitoring;
- ◆ management concerns derived through implementation experience;
- ◆ new interim national guidelines, laws, and policies; and
- ◆ listing of the Chinook salmon in 1992."

Sawtooth National Forest (September 1996)

"Since the Sawtooth forest plan was approved in 1987, there have been many changes on the land and in management of the forest. These changes involve listing of the Snake River Chinook and the sockeye salmon as Threatened and Endangered respectively under the Endangered Species Act; implementation of the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) and Interim Strategies of Managing Anadromous Fish-producing Watersheds in Eastern Oregon, Washington, Idaho, and portions of California (PACFISH); the designation of several Water Quality Limited Segments of streams; insect infestations of timber stands; unforeseen increases in recreation demands; etc.

Results of this monitoring effort indicate that while we are making good progress in many areas, we still have some work to do to provide for adequate resource protection of our resources. We need to address the range suitability issue in steep, fragile areas of the forest and we need to better address the impacts to riparian areas resulting from both human and livestock disturbances. We need to address how to get on top of the noxious weed problem and to find ways to balance social needs with resource objectives. As stated in the introduction of this report, we also need to revise the monitoring and evaluation section of the forest plan to provide use with better information concerning management implications on the ground..... The Sawtooth forest plan was signed on September 16, 1987 and therefore must be revised by 2002."

III. Overview of Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup

A working draft of the ecogroup monitoring strategy was completed in March 1997. The document outlines a conceptual strategy to provide direction for monitoring and evaluation at three administrative and ecologic scales; small (project), mid (forest), and broad (ecogroup). Combining monitoring strategies across three forests will provide consistency across administrative boundaries. It will also provide a comprehensive and broader framework for addressing issues and correlating results. The strategy outlines 4 reasons to combine monitoring efforts:

1. to better document cause and effect relationships between actions and results;
2. to determine if new technologies and methods meet our needs before adoption, and to make the best use of analyses that have already been done;
3. to anticipate emerging changes such as species listings or changed conditions; and
4. to develop an ecosystem methodology to accomplish ecosystem restoration or conservation.

The monitoring reports outlines a key Regional Forester expectation to guide land management:

"In total, management actions are designed to ensure the public's riparian areas, rangelands, and forests are managed in a properly functioning condition."

IV. North American Test of Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forestry

The Southwest Idaho Ecogroup hosted an independent review of various sets of criteria and indicators of sustainable forestry during 1998. The review was conducted under The Center for International Forestry (CIFOR) and by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Forest Service Inventorying and Monitoring Institute. This review constitutes CIFOR's North American test of sustainable forest management and is the seventh worldwide CIFOR test. The project was conducted in southwestern Idaho.

The test was conducted to develop sets of locally appropriate criteria and indicators at the forest management level. Criteria and indicators are tools that can be used to conceptualize, evaluate, and implement sustainable forest management. The principal aim of the field test is to identify criteria and indicators that are objective, cost-effective, and relevant to the sustainable management of forests. The focus of the testing procedure was to identify the smallest number of criteria and indicators needed to reliably assess forest management in a cost-effective manner. The CIFOR tests are unique in testing the application of the criteria and indicators to the field, where key decisions are made.

"The key question is not how much should we harvest or how much should we protect, but rather is the overall system sustainable."

Center for International Forestry Research North American Test of Criteria and Indicators of Sustainable Forestry, 1999

The Boise National Forest was at the heart of the study area. Other key cooperating land management organizations were the Boise Cascade Corporation and the Idaho Department of Lands. The project team was selected from a wide range of disciplines found throughout the United States, Canada, and Mexico and consisted of the following;

- three ecologists;
- one social scientist;
- one economist;
- three forest managers; and
- one forest geneticist.

Additional specialists included a carbon biochemist, an anthropologist, a systems ecologist, and a forest ecologist.

The report summarizing this test of criteria and indicators is available from the Boise National Forest.

V. Synopsis of FY 1998-99 Forest Plan Monitoring

BIOLOGICAL AND PHYSICAL SYSTEMS

There are three primary levels or scales of monitoring. The first level of monitoring and evaluation is for project level analyses such as evaluating implementation of an individual timber sale or trail construction project. The second level is monitoring and evaluation of individual resources at the mid (forest) scale. The third level is broad-scale (ecogroup) monitoring to support forest plan revision. The emphasis of monitoring in support of forest plan revision is being conducted at the mid and broad scale.

Assessment of properly functioning condition (PFC) was the primary evaluation activity in 1998-99 to support forest plan revision for the ecogroup.

Properly Functioning Condition: ecosystems at any temporal or spatial scale are in properly functioning condition when they are dynamic and resilient to disturbances to structure, composition, and processes of their biological or physical components

It is vital that the current condition of our biological and physical ecosystem elements are well understood and described at the management area level (50,000 acres to 250,000 acres) for development of appropriate management direction. PFC is a major anchor point for developing goals, objectives, standards, and guidelines necessary to address changes needed in management direction in order to achieve desired future conditions. The PFC assessment was completed for each of the ecogroup's 55 management areas at the ranger district level on all three national forests.

The steps followed to complete the PFC rapid assessments were:

1. Define scale: The ecogroup used the landscape scale with reference to the subregional scale and in a few cases the regional scale.
2. Assemble an interdisciplinary team: A team was assembled on each ranger district consisting of the district ranger, district resource specialists, forest specialists, and revision team members.
3. Complete information needs assessment: The revision team identified necessary information, maps, etc. to facilitate the PFC process. District personnel provided local on-the-ground knowledge of the subject areas.
4. Determine subject areas: Subject areas are the primary resource areas being evaluated throughout the PFC assessment. For this assessment, there were 27 subject areas which included water quality integrity, riparian areas, potential vegetation groups.
5. Complete a checklist for each subject area: Completing this checklist involved applying professional knowledge of the area to determine if individual indicators of the subject were at a condition that would be described as properly functioning. For example, one of the aquatic subject area questions (A2) stated "Is there sufficient spawning and rearing opportunities within the habitat? Specialists could then answer yes, no, or not applicable and document the rationale for their answer. [see attachment 1]

6. Rank the subject area for each management area: The specialists determined at what level a subject area was ranked. The ranking choices were 1) at PFC, 2) low risk, 3) moderate risk, 4) high risk, or 5) not functioning.

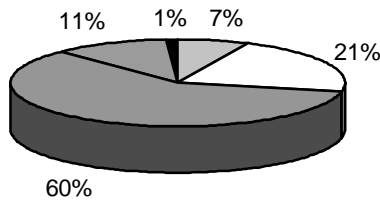
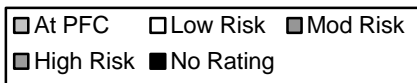
Risk: situations in which outcome is not certain, but the chance of system degradation beyond the point of resiliency and sustainability can be estimated.

The following is a summary of the PFC results for the Ecogroup. The percentage figures are accurate to \pm one percent, and summarize the percent of management areas evaluated for each PFC category. The charts do not demonstrate the percent of acres functioning at PFC or take into account the size of the subject area.

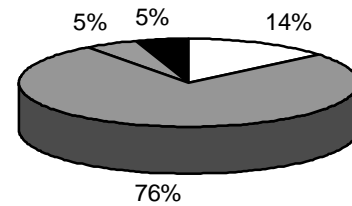
The following example may help when interpreting the charts. For Geomorphic Integrity in the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup, seven percent of the management areas evaluated are at PFC. In other words, one of the seven management areas evaluated for Geomorphic Integrity is at PFC.

Management Area PFC Results for Geomorphic Integrity

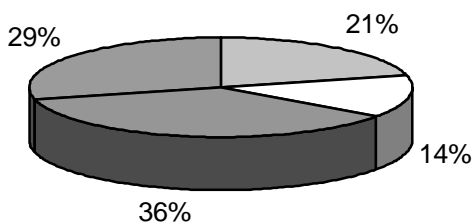
SW Idaho Ecogroup



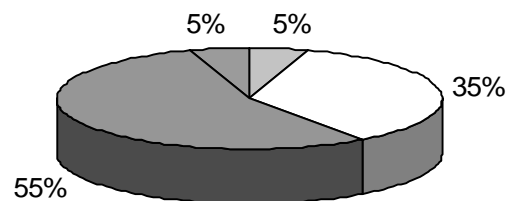
Boise National Forest



Payette National Forest

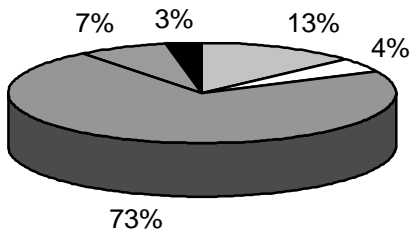
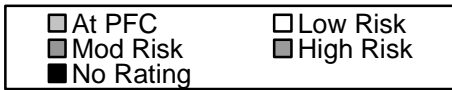


Sawtooth National Forest

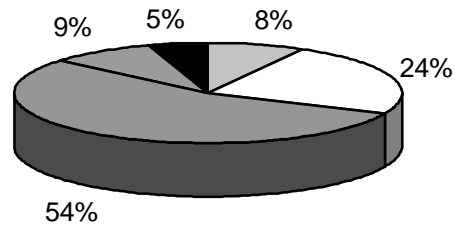


Management Area PFC Results for Water Quality Integrity, Aquatic Habitat, Riparian Areas

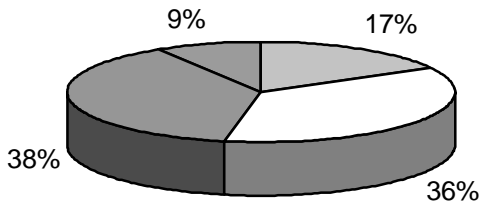
SW Idaho Ecogroup



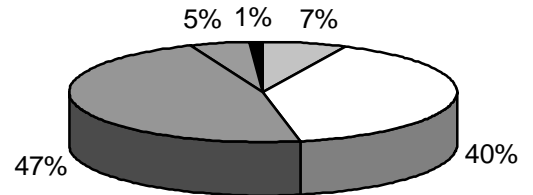
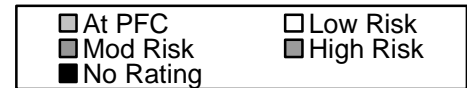
Boise National Forest



Payette National Forest

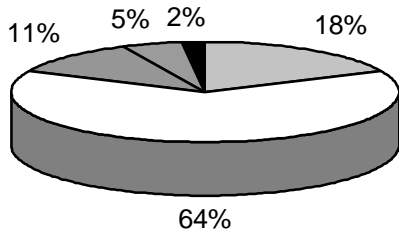


Sawtooth National Forest

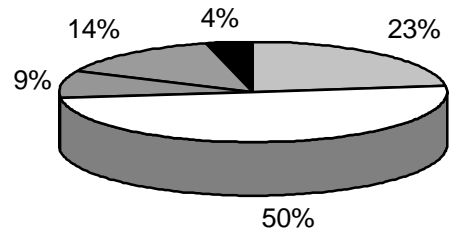


Management Area PFC Results for Terrestrial Habitat

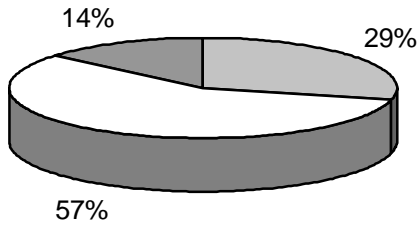
SW Idaho Ecogroup



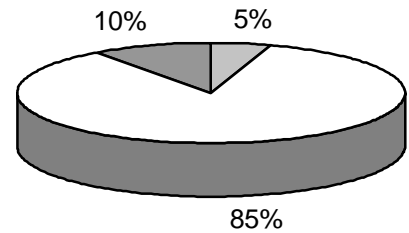
Boise National Forest



Payette National Forest



Sawtooth National Forest



The following example may help to interpret the table below. For Low Sagebrush, forty-seven percent of the management areas evaluated in the Ecogroup are considered at PFC.

Southwest Idaho Ecogroup Potential Vegetation Category Ratings

Potential Vegetation Group	Ecogroup				Boise Forest				Payette Forest				Sawtooth Forest			
Risk Level (Percent)																
Forested Vegetation	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High
Pinion/Juniper	0	20	20	60	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20	60
Aspen	13	26	26	35	0	0	80	20	0	0	0	0	17	33	11	39
Dry Ponderosa Pine	14	21	36	39	0	22	33	44	40	20	40	0	0	0	0	0
Warm Dry Doug-fir	0	5	30	65	0	0	13	87	0	34	66	0	0	0	100	0
Cool Moist Doug-fir	8	46	31	15	10	40	30	20	0	66	34	0	0	0	0	0
Cool Dry Doug-fir	13	22	44	22	0	33	47	20	75	25	0	0	8	8	54	31
Dry Grand Fir	0	18	35	47	0	0	43	57	0	30	30	40	0	0	0	0
Cool Moist Grand Fir	10	35	20	35	0	14	14	71	15	47	23	15	0	0	0	0
Warm Dry Subalpine Fir	19	57	21	2	22	78	0	0	80	20	0	0	0	47	47	5
Warm Moist Subalpine Fir	81	19	0	0	0	100	0	0	93	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hydric Subalpine Fir	100	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Persistent Lodgepole Pine	26	26	26	22	13	25	0	63	0	0	100	0	38	31	31	0
High Elevation Subalpine Fir	77	6	16	0	63	6	31	0	80	0	0	0	0	100	0	0
Risk Level (Percent)																
Shrublands & Grasslands	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High	At PFC	Low	Mod	High
Low Sagebrush	47	47	6	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	0	40	53	7	0
Mountain Big Sagebrush	31	38	23	8	67	13	7	13	50	25	25	0	0	60	35	5
Wyoming Big Sagebrush	0	87	0	13	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	86	0	13
Big Basin Sagebrush	0	40	30	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	40	30	30
Bitterbrush	0	0	86	14	0	0	80	20	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0
Perennial Grass	24	46	13	17	38	23	8	31	17	50	13	0	0	100	0	0
Perennial Grass Montaine	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	0	0	0	50	50	0	0	0	0
Montaine Shrub	70	17	13	0	81	13	6	0	75	0	25	0	50	30	20	0
Alpine Meadow	22	51	17	11	29	17	0	0	67	33	0	0	0	38	38	25

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC SYSTEMS

The Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests conducted social and economic data collection in 1998-99 to support forest plan revision. In addition to laws and regulations, the revision effort is shaped by the evolving thinking of the important role of social and economic analysis in forest planning. The social and economic analysis, still underway, addresses two recent works:

- *Guidelines for Conducting Social Assessments Within a Human Dimensions Framework* developed by the National Forest social scientists and researchers, and university social scientists (Bright, et al, 1998).

- *Sustaining the People's Land: Recommendations for Stewardship of the National Forests and Grasslands into the next Century* (Committee of Scientists, 1999).

The data collected to date will be summarized in the assessment by the following categories;

- ⇒ National/international settings and issues, including Native American tribes;
- ⇒ Regional issues, as reflected by the information gathered through the ICBEMP;
- ⇒ Socio-economic characteristics and changes in Idaho;
- ⇒ Socio-economic characteristics and changes in affected counties; and
- ⇒ Socio-economic characteristics and recent changes in affected communities.

Assessing the information listed above builds on the extensive work of scientists from the ICBEMP project and the following sources:

- economic profiles of selected communities throughout the ecogroup;
- interviews with local elected officials (county commissioners and mayors);
- community self-assessment and profiles;
- community profiles developed by the State of Idaho and Tribal Governments; and
- public comments from scoping conducted in the spring of 1997.

VI. Conclusion

The ecogroup continues to use numerous sources of information including data gathered during the PFC assessment and updated socio-economic data to complete the forest plan revision process. In the winter of 1999, the forests will publish "The Current Situation Summary for the Southwest Idaho Ecogroup - Understanding the Past, Present, and Future" This document will provide an overview of the relationship between commodity production and the natural environment. The document will provide information about major changes occurring on public lands and discusses the opportunities and limitations the ecogroup faces in the future of natural resource management on National Forest System lands.

The release of the draft environmental impact statement and draft forest plans in the spring of 2000 will provide a comprehensive framework for establishing management direction and a monitoring framework for the next 10-15 years of management on the Boise, Payette, and Sawtooth National Forests. This document will be made available to the public for review and comment for 90 days.