



National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition

News Bulletin

March 18, 2010

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TO: Member Counties, School Districts, and Businesses of the National Forest Counties and Schools Coalition

FROM: Bob Douglas, NFCSC Executive Director

RE: USFS Proposed Planning Rule - Local Input Opportunity (April 6 - April 29)
Immediate Action Required!

Background

The U.S. Forest Service is moving forward with the process to develop a new Planning Rule. This collaborative process according to the USFS website is designed to provide numerous avenues for contributing meaningful input to the agencies decision making process and allows diverse interests to come together and explore critical issues. It is important to note that this collaborative process is not about specific National Forest Plans or projects. The input received will be used by the National Forest Service Rule Writing Team in developing a draft environmental impact statement and a proposed National Forest Planning Rule.

The input portion of the process at the national level will include a science forum, three national roundtables, and roundtable input sessions in each of the nine USFS Regions.

Local Action Needed

The Region Roundtables are scheduled as follows during the month of April 2010.

April 6	Region 5	(3 sites)
April 6	Region 6	(1 site)
April 8	Region 4	(14 sites)
April 12, 14, 21	Region 2	(3 sites)
April 13	Region 1	(3 sites)
April 13	Region 10	(1 site)
April 16	Region 8	(1 site)
April 28	Region 3	(1 site)
April 29	Region 9	(1 site)

I have attached a copy of the USFS schedule for these sessions and the name and phone number of the contact person for each region. We would recommend that you go to your forest service region website and register to attend the input session closest to your home. You may access the Forest Service website by going to www.fs.fed.us. Go to the section on the new Planning Rule and click on the Planning Rule website, from there you can access the regional input sessions.

The Message

It is critically important for forest county leaders, citizens, and businesspersons to provide input to this process. The voices of forest county citizens and communities must be heard loud and clear during this rule development process. We would suggest that we take this opportunity to remind the USFS that it is important and legally required for them to:

- Grant counties and other local government entities cooperating agency status and then to weigh the input of those agencies heavily because they represent input from locally elected officials.
- Adhere to the legal requirements set forth in NEPA and NFMA and coordinate their plan development processes and decision making processes with entities of state and local government.
- Ensure that the Planning Rule incorporates provisions to require broad collaboration among stakeholders at a scale and scope that is as local as possible in order to capture essential and unique on-the-ground knowledge of forests, watersheds, and ecosystems as new National Forest Plans are developed.
- Balance the economic and social impacts with biological and ecological impacts as new Forest Plans are developed. In the last two decades largely in response to litigation and appeals, the USFS responsibility to equally consider economic and social impacts on forest communities has been largely left out or devalued in the decision making process of the USFS. Federal law requires that all factors be considered when developing plans and forest counties should insist that the new planning regulation restores economic and social impact analysis to its given legal status.
- Given the intensity of wildfires and the damage to private property, the loss of life, and the devastation of over 50 million acres over the last decade from catastrophic wildfire, it would be appropriate and responsible for us to remind them that both human and forest health and safety should be one of the overarching goals of the new planning process. Active forest management in the new Forest Plans should lead to healthier forests and safer and more sustainable communities.
- Finally, we would encourage you to take this opportunity to remind everyone that the continuation and reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Act is a critical element in continuing to have healthy and vital communities in and adjacent to our National Forests. USFS employees, forest county citizens, and all Americans using these lands rely upon these communities to provide high quality services. SRSCA is one of the keys to forest counties continuing to provide such services.

Campaign Talking Points

Attached please find a set of talking points that the campaign staff have prepared for your use at these hearing sessions to highlight the importance of reauthorizing SRSCA. Please weave these points into your presentations at the regional listening sessions.

Let us know which sessions you will be attending, so we can contact people to attend those that will not be covered. We want to have Coalition Members making presentations to as many of these Regional USFS Sessions as possible.

CORRECTION - CAMPAIGN WEBSITE

In the last News Bulletin from the National Forest Counties & Schools Coalition there was an incorrect website address for the Partnership For Rural America. The following is the correct website:

www.PartnershipForRuralAmerica.org