

MULTIPLE-USE MANAGEMENT OF UPLAND HARDWOOD FORESTS

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ABSTRACT. In recent years the National Forests have experienced much controversy over multiple-use management. Because of this, the Forest Service is examining ways to improve the multiple-use planning process. One of the new approaches involves a special plan for eight National Forests in the South and Central Appalachian Mountains, in which planning is done by interdisciplinary teams, and the public is significantly involved in the planning process. A guide has been prepared, and planning is starting for the smaller units within the area. In the early stages, this new method of multiple-use planning is meeting with strong public support.

IN RECENT YEARS the National Forests have been the subject of much controversy, usually involving some public group that disagrees with the Forest Service's management practices in a particular area. The public group usually has a special interest that they feel is not being satisfied by the Forest Service multiple-use management plans. The disagreements become quite intense, and some end up in court.

Because of these conflicts, the Forest Service is examining ways to improve its multiple-use planning process. Different planning organizations and methods are being explored and tested in various parts of the country. A new approach to multiple-use planning is being developed for a group of National Forests in the South and Central Appalachian Mountains.

The part of the Appalachians involved in this special planning extends from northern West Virginia to northern Georgia, including parts of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, and South Carolina. The National

Forests within it are the Monongahela, George Washington, Jefferson, Pisgah, Nantahala, Cherokee, Chattahoochee, and part of the Sumter.

This area is a natural and logical planning unit. It contains similar terrain, climate, and forest conditions throughout. Rural development considerations are important. Local economic and social needs that depend on forest commodities frequently conflict with the recreation amenities demanded by surrounding urban population centers. Traditional resource uses such as timber harvesting are opposed by demands for wilderness preservation. The National Forest land managers are beset with many problems trying to balance the uses of the public lands. They have a tremendous challenge to develop better land-use plans and make them more acceptable to more of the public.

Before discussing the new approach, I will comment briefly on the present multiple-use planning system. Plans are made at

the Ranger District level in accordance with guides developed at the Regional level. The Regional guides are very broad, as they cover a large area containing many different situations. The Ranger District plans are more specific and employ the zoning concept. The District is zoned according to the resource situations and uses. Objectives for each zone are established, and decisions are made to coordinate the different management activities in the zones. Some major problems in this approach are:

- Since planning expertise and special talents are most often located at higher levels of the Forest Service than the Ranger Districts, they do not play a big enough role in multiple-use planning.
- The higher level experts do prepare functional plans for management of single resources such as timber and recreation. Instead of being governed and directed by multiple-use plans, these functional plans sometimes have more force than the multiple-use plans and can be in conflict with each other. The tail can wag the dog.
- The public is not involved in the planning process.

The new approach is designed to overcome these major problems. It has two main characteristics. (1) Planning is done by interdisciplinary teams. (2) There is significant public involvement.

The New Approach

This new approach for multiple-use planning in the South and Central Appalachian National Forests was activated in August 1970 by the Regional Foresters and Forest Supervisors of the Forests involved. A special interdisciplinary team was formed to spearhead the planning. The first step was to involve the public through a series of listening sessions.

The planning team traveled throughout the area and conducted open meetings at which the public was invited to present their ideas and comment on the new planning system. The team also consulted with many knowledgeable and concerned groups such as the Appalachian Regional Commis-

sion, local governments, universities, and conservation organizations. Questionnaires were distributed to Forest Service employees, and discussion meetings were held. Based on all this, the planning team developed a planning system and a draft for a proposed planning guide.

The various public elements were again involved in reviewing the proposed guide. Another round of listening sessions was conducted, and comments were solicited from interested parties. A thorough review was made by all of the involved Forests. The team redrafted the guide. After a final review, the guide was issued in June 1971. The final product is marked not only by Forest Service expertise, but, more importantly, by tremendous public involvement. It is designed for application to the specific Appalachian area involved. It contains objectives for this special planning area and establishes guidelines for carrying them out in a consistent and uniform way.

The main feature of the planning system is the unit plan. The total area will be divided into logical planning units. They will most frequently be watersheds, but will not be required to adhere to Ranger District, Forest, State or any other artificial or political boundaries. The aim is to have a natural planning unit subject to intensive planning within, and consideration of the needs of the whole of which it is a part.

Gains Public Support

After issuance of the guide, the actual unit planning was begun in the summer of 1971. Interdisciplinary teams are being formed on each involved National Forest. They include geologists, wildlife biologists, soil scientists, landscape architects, foresters, and other professionals. All levels and units of the Forest Service may be asked to participate. Cooperating agencies will be called on for participation. The teams will be charged with developing unit plans in accordance with the guide. The main steps will be as follows:

1. Gather basic data and inventory resources of the unit.
2. Conduct listening sessions and tours to gain public understanding and participation.

3. Analyze the data and public input and draft a proposed unit plan.
4. Conduct another round of public review and comment.
5. Make a final draft of the unit plan for review and approval by the Forest Supervisor.
6. The Forest Supervisor will distribute the unit plan within the organization and to the public.

These are the main features of unit planning. Also built into the system are other features such as computerizing the data, plan maintenance, execution components, evaluation, and reporting.

An obvious question is, where will all the money and people come from to do this big job of planning? The answer is that the starting phase will have to be done by ad-

justing our present forces and budget. We hope that a successful beginning will generate accelerated support and appropriations. Much time and efficiency can be gained just by reducing the intensity and amount of time spent in handling complaints, disagreements, petitions, appeals, and court cases.

One thing is certain: we cannot afford to sit still with our present system and wait for problems to go away. We have to move out aggressively, learning from our past mistakes and applying our newfound interdisciplinary expertise in the proper place. Throughout the early stages, the public has been overwhelmingly behind this new approach to multiple-use planning. We have every reason to believe that public support will grow even stronger as we progress into unit planning. We look forward with optimism. We are confident of success.