



EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Plan Well, Plan Often

This issue includes an invited paper by Courtney Schultz and her colleagues commenting on the application of the newly adopted U.S. Forest Service Planning Rule (hereafter, the rule) for wildlife. The rule is basically implementing language to interpret the spirit and intent of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) of 1976. Laws such as NFMA require additional clarification to enable responsible parties to implement the law as intended by Congress. The NFMA had 1 phrase related to wildlife, "... provide for diversity of plant and animal communities based on the suitability and capability of the specific land area ...". Although somewhat brief and simply stated, interpretation and implementation of the language has been difficult. The 1982 planning rule was the second version developed and was largely in effect until superseded by the latest planning rule. The 1982 rule included 3 key provisions relevant to wildlife: management indicator species (MIS), species viability, and monitoring. I will not dwell on details here, but these 3 provisions proved to be difficult to implement and full of real and perceived obstacles. The concept of MIS was largely debunked in the scientific literature for numerous reasons. Even so, forests selected MIS despite wide-scale criticism of species selected. Species viability is a challenging concept, let alone one easily addressed by management agencies. As a result, it proved problematic to implement. Monitoring is the foundation of adaptive management. Rigorous monitoring of wildlife populations and habitats can be costly. It also requires a strong commitment and wherewithal to get it done. Resource agencies such as the Forest Service have limited funds and personnel. As a result, some things are more difficult to accomplish than others. Often, monitoring was difficult to

implement. The bottom line is that the provisions for wildlife in the 1982 planning rule were difficult, if not impossible, to implement. Clearly, the agency needed a plan that worked; hence, they embarked on a journey to improve the planning rule.

In 1997, the Secretary of Agriculture convened a committee of scientists to develop recommendations to improve forest management. Barry Noon, one of the co-authors of the paper in this issue, was part of that committee. In 1999, the committee produced a report summarizing their recommendations. It was initially founded on concepts of ecological sustainability and later coupled with needs for economic sustainability. In my opinion, the report developed by the committee of scientists represented a huge step forward. In many ways, it was a huge departure from business as usual. It led to a series of meetings and workshops to allow the agency to figure out what it meant and how to apply it to real-world management. A number of forces were at work, not always moving in the same direction. Planning rules were drafted in 2000, 2002, 2008, and 2012. The rules were reviewed, considered, and then redrafted. The agency worked hard to create a planning rule that was faithful to the NFMA, implementable, and palatable to the American public. After more than a decade of planning and re-planning, a draft planning rule was distributed to the public for comment. A revised version of the planning was adapted and is being implemented. What does it all mean for wildlife? Read the paper to find out!

—**Bill Block**
Editor-in-Chief