



U.S. Forest Service National Forest System Briefing Paper

Date: June 22, 2016

Key Issue: Valuing Outdoor Experiences: an update on the five high priority shifts

In FY2016 and beyond, the Forest Service has refocused its efforts on strengthening and deepening connections with the public through outdoor experiences. This effort is flexible and deliberate, involving actions that capitalize on leverage points within our working environment. Specifically, there is a national focus integrating five initial high priority shifts:

Shift 1: Enhance visitor and community benefits through modernizing recreation special uses

What we heard: There is a culture of regulating occupancy and use; protecting FS natural resources from visitors; moratoriums, units are process stuck

We aspire to a future where we enhance citizen experiences, services, and benefits through Special Uses. We have implemented a modernization effort which is focused on “enhancing guest services” through Recreation Special Uses (RSU) and shifting away from regulating occupancy and use through transactional relationships. Through a focused streamlining and simplification of policy for temporary and priority outfitted activities we are simplifying instruments to accommodate youth groups and educational organizations who seek services to facilitate access. Additionally, national modernization of our business tools including the Special Uses Database System and creating accessible electronic permit applications are beginning to augment the shortage of local staff capacity to administer permits.

What we are doing:

Facilitate outdoor experiences for the American public:

- On June 6th, 2016 a letter from the Chief with leadership intent and guidance to the field to prioritize the work and use existing flexibilities to streamline the permit process was sent to the field. This was followed up by a webinar hosted by the Chief and Deputy Chief Weldon, which was attended by more than 600 line officers and program staff. To enhance visitor and community benefits through modernizing recreation special uses, the agency is focusing on three areas:
 - Nominal effects: Under 36 CFR 251.50(e)(1), the Forest Service aims to advance without undue process activities that will not impact or will have only nominal effects on NFS lands.
 - National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA): the Agency will establish a consistent approach to NEPA application to special uses by implementing existing Categorical Exclusions.
 - Needs assessments and capacity studies: to establish a more consistent approach to how assessments and studies are applied to special uses, the agency aims to simplify assessments and studies by implementing these analyses where and when necessary.
- Minor edits to the directives system are drafted and will soon be in internal review process. Specifically, needs assessment language in the directives has been updated to be in sync with the 2012 Planning Rule.
- Recreation Special Uses Success Stories are being published and shared with both the broader Special Uses community and the agency leadership.

- An extensive effort is underway to use the Lean Six Sigma process in order to determine short falls, waste, and duplicative processes in processing special uses.
- An in-depth policy analysis of current processes and authorizing environments for special uses was completed in the late fall/mid-winter 2015/2016; lessons learned are being incorporated into other work such as policy revision, instruction to the field, and the like.

Modernize tools to support internal and external system users:

- ePermit: Substantial agency resources are being applied to finding a solution to an electronic permit application system; a contract entity to conduct the work is identified and establishment of operating agreements, legal framework, and the like are underway.
- Special Uses Data System: An extensive, multi-staff effort is proceeding to determine the needs and future desired state of the next special use data system.

Rebuild a technically capable workforce to administer the program:

- Strike Teams/Regional backlog: Funds have been distributed to the regions to temporarily increase staff as need to address their backlog of current permits. This effort is directed at the regional level.
- Training module develop: Funds are set aside and a project kick-off meeting is scheduled for the week of June 20th. Individual modules will be developed over the course of the next year and made available for use as soon as completed.
- Resource Assistant Program: Efforts are in progress to start an annual program of hiring Resource Assistants for one-year entry level/training programs with the intent of hiring them into PFT positions at the completion of the program. This effort will be implemented mid-summer 2016.

Shift 2: Increase our capacity and focus on our community service and volunteer programs

What we heard: “Volunteers, when we have the time, are a way to get some of our work done”

We aspire to value and embrace citizen stewards who connect our constituents to public lands. By expanding our volunteer base to include the ‘missing middle’ we create opportunities for more Americans to “Get Outside, Grow and Give Back.”

What we are doing:

- Recent press release regarding over \$11M FS investments in over 120 21CSC projects on Forest Lands was followed by endorsements from Senators Bennett (CO) and McCain (AZ) for projects accomplished in their respective states. Subsequently, additional FS and Partner investments leveraged an additional \$750K for 21CSC projects on Valuing Outdoors Experiences on Demonstration Areas and other locations bringing the total investment by USDA and partners to nearly \$12M.
- Announced seven National Volunteers & Service Award recipients for Citizen Stewardship & Partnership, Cultural Diversity, Enduring Service, Leadership and Restoration. Award winners included volunteers, partners and Forest Service staff for contributions that expanded the engagement of Deaf populations, veterans and youth on Forest Lands and watersheds in Hawaii, Illinois, California, New Mexico, Missouri, Washington and Vermont.
- Launched the Resource Assistants Program with eight pilot partners this spring. The Resource Assistants Program provides opportunities for individuals to contribute to the Forest Service mission through an immersive and rigorous work experience on Forest units and projects and earn a two year hiring eligibility for FS positions after completing 960 hours satisfactorily and fulfilling a higher education requirement. To date, nearly 50 Resource Assistants have been enrolled.

- Youth employed on 21CSC projects are helping to coordinate and facilitate Every Kid in a Park (EKip) experiences and volunteer projects; EKip will be the focus of Forest Service National Public Lands Day 2016 activities.

Shift 3: Develop and implement a digital innovation strategy

What we heard: We are digitally disconnected, hard to find, hard to reach, and our data is dated

We aspire to provide a high-quality web presence, E-Permits, and data that our citizens can openly access. This allows us to share the ‘big why’ through a proactive strategy that identifies actions for improving recreation digital services and associated quality of open data by focusing on customer service and sharing information. We aim to establish partnerships and alliances with internal and external stakeholders to efficiently provide web services, share data and information, and meet the demands of an increasingly mobile society through contemporary social media and digital tools, such as “it’s all yours. go.play.”

What we are doing:

- : Migration of Recreation Site Accessibility Database to the Enterprise Data Warehouse with auto-loading into the Web Portal, Rec.gov and the Integrated Visitor Map continues, providing visitors with accurate recreation site accessibility information ; Regions 4 and 5 are partnering with seven Youth Conservation Corps crews to conduct accessibility surveys of rec. sites and upload that data using smart devices (iPads).
- Heritage Natural Resource Manager (NRM) modernization is centered on a refinement of complex resource documentation, attribute descriptions, and newly added geospatial applications that will also apply to other NRM resource modules to be updated. The “reframing” of the software structure will create better efficiency, standards and intuitiveness, allow for mobile and remote sensing data usage, and enable users to “manage” the resource in active, real time mode of information for enhanced management decisions and performance. Some new modifications will enable site data to be used for public media venues and enhanced interpretation features.
- During the week of May 16, all regions were represented and participated in Web Manager training to learn to learn techniques on highlighting Forest Service recreation site information on local, regional and national websites in a consistent and user-friendly manner.
- The Forest Service is well on its way to modernizing our web presence, including a recent surge in Spanish language content. “It’s All Yours,” “Discover the Forest,” and the Naturewatch page all have parallel Spanish pages. The agency has a chance to distinguish itself as a progressive land management agency by fully developing www.bosque.gov.
- For over a decade Recreation.gov has become much more than a website; it is a federal recreation and reservation service platform. In 2015, there were more than 22.3 million sessions, 12 million visitors and 220 million page views to Recreation.gov. We are on the verge of ushering in a new era for Recreation.gov with the award of a new contract that will provide a secure and reliable service while also enhancing the user experience. Every design element, every piece of functionality, all of the navigational features, the various workflows, are all designed to create a delightful, intuitive and simple experience. On day one of the new contract, we will embark on an agile process to develop the new system. The agile approach provides the ability to respond to change and better positions the program to develop a service platform that meets the needs of visitors today and into the future.

Shift 4: Improve citizen access through our system of recreation roads and trails

What we heard: Trails and roads are vital linkages to forest dependent communities, critical to their economy and we are slow to recognize their value.

We aspire to provide economically critical linkages to forest dependent communities. Our recreation trails and roads are the backbone for citizens; hosting benefits to visitors and communities alike. They provide safe, sustainable, and well managed access to a broad spectrum of recreation opportunities and experiences. Working in collaboration with a diverse and engaged public, the Forest Service embraces its leadership role as a community member, public land steward, and key service provider of access to public lands. This includes continued travel management planning, the new National Trails Strategy and the lessons learned through the Valuing Outdoor Experience Demonstrations Areas.

What we are doing:

- **Travel Management Rule Subpart A – Minimum Road System:** The agency is currently completing the evaluation of existing NFS roads and will soon release Travel Analysis Reports (TARs) that identify NFS roads that are likely needed and likely not needed for each forest. While TAR recommendations are not decisions, this information will help inform the identification of the minimum road system (MRS) and be considered in future TMR decisions.
- **TMR Subpart B – Route and Area Designation:** Over 90% of the forests have published Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUMs) designating legally authorized public use of motorized vehicle use on NF lands including NFS roads, trails and areas. Implementation of Subpart B has significantly changed motorize travel on NFS lands; shifting from over 65 million acres (approximately 34%) of NFS lands being open to cross-country travel by motor vehicles in 2006, to 12 million acres (less than 7%) of NFS lands being open to motor vehicle cross country travel in 2015. Several forests currently continue to work toward completing subpart B and MVUM publication, while many progress towards a second iteration of MVUM designations informed by subpart A recommendations. The application of Executive Orders 11644 and 11989 regarding minimizing the effects of motorized vehicle use is primarily accomplished through subpart B designations.
- **TMR Subpart C – Over Snow Vehicles Route and Area Designation:** Over-Snow Motor Vehicle Use Maps (OSVUMs) designate the legally authorized public use of over-snow motorized vehicle use on NFS roads, trails and areas. The agency is currently preparing database capabilities, instructions, and training resources to support the initial launch and publication of OSVUMs beginning in FY 2017.
- **National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System –** The Strategy provides guidance in providing a socially, economically and environmentally sustainable trail system and is relevant and responsive to the needs of a diverse and changing population. Over 200 people have contributed to the development of the Strategy, including employees from all levels of the agency, other government partners, many non-governmental organizations, and health care and private industry representatives from across the country. The Strategy is going through final revisions based on feedback from thirteen virtual focus sessions held in March 2016, and Chief Tidwell is expecting to announce the final National Strategy for a Sustainable Trail System in fiscal year 2016.

Shift 5: Value iconic places as special, enhancing visitor services through demonstration outcomes

What we heard: “You have some incredible special places, yet you don’t seem to show up different there”

We aspire to show up in a remarkably different way in our special places. In FY2016 a community of practice (CoP) of 17 units/programs has been developed where we are experimenting with new and innovative ways of engaging the public. RSA Field Executives have identified these areas as places where we can demonstrate and learn through a diverse spectrum of settings, using the following factors:

opportunity to connect to urban citizens; gateway opportunities; population growth; demonstrate the learning (“How we show up”); ability to catalyze others; distribution across the agency; urban programs as methods to connect the public to non-NFS land, through partners, states, and cooperatives; connect with underserved segments of our demographically diverse nation; identification of locations where regional executive leadership and line desire to “show up” in a strong manner. These units and programs will spend FY 2016 and beyond specifically striving to implement components of the five high priority shifts.

What we are doing:

- The Forest Service has initiated an “Iconic Places” framework to increase our emphasis on quality experiences and leverage investments at high profile designated areas and landscapes of acute public interest and visitor use.
- Iconic Places include Congressionally-designated and Presidentially-proclaimed areas, such as San Gabriel National Monument, Chimney Rock National Monument, and Spring Mountain National Recreation Area, as well as landscapes of acute public interest and visitor use.
- The Iconic Places framework intends to elevate public awareness, enhance citizen stewardship, and ultimately elevate management of these landscapes to the high standard our citizen owners expect.
- With national funding and leadership support, by 2020 we intend for Forest Service Iconic Places to be household names and premier visitor destinations – known, appreciated, and cherished by the public who play a key role in preserving them.
- Efforts are underway to inventory Iconic Places and conduct a national needs and data assessment.
- Iconic Places pilots are currently incorporating field ranger programs, 21st Century Conservation Service Corp training, and leveraged partnership investments.
- Progress is being made to build a national team of line officers and other national and field staff to develop, share, and move forward best practices for managing our Iconic Places.
- In FY17, the Forest Service will engage with national media campaigns, e.g., “It’s All Yours”, web and social media platforms, e.g., Recreation.gov and Yonder, to promote the unique recreation opportunities and experiences that these places provide.
- In early May a kickoff meeting was held for the Valuing Outdoor Experiences Demonstration Areas Community of Practice. These units, spread across the country, are focusing on implementing the 5 high leverage shifts in innovative ways. Stemming from this effort are sub groups focusing on transit pilots, concessionaire programs and 4 season resort use. Their shared learning is being captured in the Outdoor Experiences Playbook.