



File Code: 1920/1950

Date: October 28, 2010

Dear Interested Party,

The Caribou-Targhee National Forest (Forest) is proposing to amend the 1997 Revised Forest Plan (1997 Plan) for the Targhee portion of the Forest (Targhee). The National Forest System lands affected by the amendment are located in Bonneville, Clark, Fremont, Lemhi, Madison and Teton counties, ID, and Teton and Lincoln counties, WY. A draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is expected to be available in January 2011 with a final EIS out in April 2011.

This is our third proposal to amend the 1997 Plan for the Targhee. Previous proposals were described in notices of intent to prepare supplemental Environmental Impact Statements (EISs) published in the Federal Register on May 30, 2007, and on May 21, 2008. My staff and I have developed the current proposal which includes new approaches to establishing standards and guidelines to manage forested vegetation and provide wildlife habitat on the Targhee.

The proposed amendment:

1. Provides direction to maintain the characteristics of old-growth forests where they exist and eliminate a "quota" for old-growth and late-seral forested vegetation by principal watershed or ecological subsection;
2. Replaces requirements for maintaining "biological potential" with clear direction for snag retention to provide habitat for cavity-nesting birds; and
3. Provides direction to maintain habitat in northern goshawk, boreal owl and great gray owl territories affected by vegetation projects.

After a complete analysis, I will decide to approve the proposed amendment to the 1997 Plan; approve a modification of the proposed amendment; or not to amend the 1997 Plan at this time. I am seeking comments on the current proposal in order to clarify the issues, decide how the proposed amendment may need to be modified, and determine whether or not it is necessary to develop additional alternative(s) for analysis in the draft EIS.

#### **Purpose of and Need for the Action**

The 1997 Plan includes direction that has proven difficult to analyze and implement. Specifically, the 1997 Plan requires 20 percent of forested vegetation be maintained in the old-growth and late-seral age classes in each principal watershed. After much deliberation, the Forest believes that 1997 Plan direction to maintain a certain amount of old-growth and late-seral vegetation does not reflect the ecological capability of the Targhee. Because of the stand characteristics of lodgepole pine and aspen cover types, and the frequency of natural change and disturbances in the ecosystem, some principal watersheds may never meet the 20 percent guideline. Consequently, the Forest proposes to amend the 1997 Plan to maintain old-growth forests where they actually occur.



Similarly, the concept of biological potential used in the 1997 Plan has also proven problematic because of conflicting requirements at the watershed scale and Management Prescription scale. Clear and practical direction is necessary to ensure that adequate numbers of snags and/or green trees having evidence of cavities, nesting activity, or decadence would be retained where commercial timber harvest occurs.

Finally, the elimination of redundant guidelines for the management of forested vegetation could clarify the 1997 Plan direction.

### **Proposed Action**

After several years of implementing the 1997 Plan, it is evident that some adjustments are needed to incorporate new information, to address agency implementation concerns and also the public's concerns regarding direction in the Plan.

The Forest is proposing to amend the 1997 Plan to create more consistent and clear management direction for old-growth forests and snag retention. The analysis for this amendment will describe habitat relationships for selected wildlife species associated with forested vegetation. These relationships would be described in the proposed amendment and monitored through time to ensure that adequate habitat is maintained for these species. The proposed amendment would include changes to the associated monitoring items and update definitions in the 1997 Plan glossary. The proposed amendment would apply only to the Targhee portion of the Caribou-Targhee National Forest.

The proposed amendment would not authorize or approve any specific actions or activities. Prior to implementing any site-specific projects, the Forest would determine consistency with the 1997 Plan, as amended, to ensure compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other applicable laws and regulations. The following amendments to the 1997 Plan are proposed:

#### Vegetation - Forestwide Direction for Old-Growth Forests:

1. Delete the forest-wide guideline for old-growth and late-seral forest stages listed as number 6 and found on pages III-12-13 of the 1997 Plan.  
*Exception:* Retain standard number (6)(3): Use the definition of old-growth characteristics by forest type found in *Characteristics of Old-Growth Forests in the Intermountain Region* (Hamilton 1993).
2. Replace the guideline in Item 1 above with the following:
  - a. Prescribed fire and mechanical treatments in old-growth stands should not reduce old-growth characteristics below the minimum standards described in *Characteristics of Old-Growth Forests in the Intermountain Region* (Hamilton 1993) and further defined in the March 2, 2007 Regional Forester's letter of clarification (Guideline)."

*Exceptions:* This guideline does *not* apply to:

- i. Highway and utility corridors where hazard tree removal is necessary for public safety;
  - ii. Management Prescriptions:
    - 4.1(Developed Recreation Sites)
    - 4.2(Special Use Permit Recreation Sites)
    - 4.3(Dispersed Camping Management)
    - 8.1 (Concentrated Developed Areas)
- b. Prescribed fire and mechanical treatments within old-growth stands should be limited to treatments necessary to sustain old-growth forest composition and structure and improve the likelihood that old-growth forests are retained on the landscape. Examples of these tools are thinning-from-below and under burning to reduce the risk of stand-replacing fire (Guideline).

Wildlife-Direction for Snags/Cavity Nesting Habitat

1. Delete forest-wide guideline numbers 1, 2 and 3 for Snag/Cavity Nesting Habitat listed on pages III-16-17.
2. Delete the Management Prescription guidelines related to snag retention and biological potential for woodpeckers listed in the table below:

Table 1: 1997 Plan Guidelines for Biological Potential by Management Prescription

Management Prescription		Biological Potential
2.6.1[a]	Grizzly Bear Habitat (No ASQ, no cross-country, no sheep)(III-98)	60%
2.8.3	Aquatic Influence Zone (III-109)	100%
3.2[b,c,d,g,i,j]	Semi-primitive Motorized (III-121)	60%
5.1[c]	Timber Management (III-136)	40%
5.1.3[a-b]	Timber Management (No clear-cutting, urban interface) (III-137)	40%
5.1.4[a-d]	Timber Management (Big Game Security Emphasis)(III-139)	40%
5.2.1	Visual Quality Improvement (III-143)	40%
5.3.5	Grizzly Bear Habitat (NIC for ASQ, no cross-county, no sheep)(III-148)	60%
5.4[a,b,c]	Elk Summer Range(III-153)	60%

3. Replace the guidelines listed in items 1 and 2 above with:
  - a. Commercial timber harvest will not reduce the number of snags and/or green trees below the numbers in the table below. This will be calculated as an average for the total treatment unit acres within a project area to allow variability between treatment units and retain a more natural, clumped distribution of snags and green trees (Guideline).”

Table 2: Proposed Snag and Green Tree Retention Guidelines

Vegetation Category (SAF Cover Type <sup>1</sup> )	Minimum average snags and/or green trees per acre to retain		
	>= 8" dbh <sup>2</sup>	>= 12" dbh	Total
Aspen	8.3	N/A	8.3
Cottonwood	3.2	4.9	8.1
Douglas-fir and Spruce-Fir	3.7	5.5	9.2
Lodgepole pine	8.7	N/A	8.7

*Exceptions:* This guideline does *not* apply to:

- i. Designated personal-use firewood areas;
- ii. Highway and utility corridors where hazard tree removal is necessary for public safety;
- iii. Management Prescriptions:
  - 4.1(Developed Recreation Sites)
  - 4.2(Special Use Permit Recreation Sites)
  - 4.3(Dispersed Camping Management)
  - 8.1 (Concentrated Developed Areas)
- b. Large diameter snags and/or green trees having evidence of cavities, nesting activity, or decadence would be given priority for retention (Guideline).
- c. Public workforce and contractor safety will be considered and provided for in selecting the arrangement of retained snags and trees (Standard).

Wildlife-Forestwide direction for northern goshawk, boreal and great gray owl habitat

1. Delete the forest-wide standards and guidelines for northern goshawk habitat (entire table on III-21), guideline number 2 for boreal owl habitat (III-22) and standard number 2 for great gray owl habitat (III-22).
2. Replace the above standards and guidelines with the following guideline:
  - a. Utilize site-specific data to predict whether a proposed project may negatively impact Northern goshawks, boreal owls, and/or great gray owls, and whether habitat occurs within the project area. If there is habitat and the species may be negatively impacted by the project:
    - i. Survey for the presence of Northern goshawks, boreal owls and/or great gray owls at least once prior to project implementation.
    - ii. Design projects to maintain adequate amounts of habitat in known territories.

<sup>1</sup> Eyre, F.H. editor 1980 *Cover Types of the United States and Canada* Society of American Foresters, Washington D.D. pp 80-141.

<sup>2</sup> dbh: diameter at breast height.

### Big Hole Subsection and Caribou Subsection-Guidelines for old-growth

1. Delete the following guideline applicable in both subsections: "Within one mile of the Palisades Reservoir and the South Fork of the Snake River, emphasis will be given to managing old-growth Douglas-fir, spruce and cottonwood habitats for wildlife species" (III-61 and 62).

### Monitoring and Glossary

The proposed amendment would also update the 1997 Plan monitoring requirements and definitions related to the proposed above changes (Chapter V and Glossary).

### **Preliminary Issues**

The Interdisciplinary Team (IDT) and Responsible Official considered the comments received in response to previous scoping documents to develop the following issues.

#### **Issue 1: Management of old-growth forested vegetation**

Issue 1a: Specific quantities of old-growth forests ("quotas") at the principal watershed or ecological subsection scale are necessary to provide adequate amounts of diverse wildlife habitat.

Issue 1b: Manage lodgepole pine and aspen cover types to allow for the development of old-growth characteristics and ensure adequate amounts of "replacement old growth".

Issue 1c: Do not manage lodgepole pine and aspen cover types for old-growth because these seral forests may not have the capacity to develop into old-growth age classes on the Targhee.

Issue 1d: Retain large blocks of unmanaged forests to ensure connectivity and adequate habitat for a diverse population of wildlife species.

Issue 1e: Develop new definitions for old-growth forests on the Targhee using additional stand characteristics such as basal area, canopy cover, downed logs, and categories of snags rather than relying on the *Characteristics of Old-Growth Forests in the Intermountain Region* (Hamilton 1993).

#### **Issue 2: Manage snags and green trees to provide cavity-nesting habitat**

Retain large blocks of unmanaged forests to ensure adequate numbers and distribution of snags and green trees to provide cavity-nesting habitat.

#### **Issues 3: Manage for all age classes of forested vegetation to meet wildlife habitat needs**

#### **Issue 4: Do not manage forested vegetation below 7500 feet in elevation**

### **Applicable Planning Rule**

On December 18, 2009, the previous planning rule was reinstated, commonly known as the 2000 planning rule in the Federal Register (Federal Register, Volume 74, No. 242, Friday, December 18, 2009, pages 67059 thru 67075). The transition provisions of the reinstated rule (36 CFR 219.35 and appendices A and B) allow use of the provisions of the National Forest System land

and resource management planning rule in effect prior to the effective date of the 2000 Rule (November 9, 2000), commonly called the 1982 planning rule, to amend or revise plans. (Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1600-1614; 36 CFR 219.35 (74 FR 67073-67074))

**How to Comment:** Comments concerning the scope of this analysis must be received by November 29, 2010. Send written comments to Megan Bogle, Forest Planner, Caribou-Targhee National Forest, P.O. Box 777, Driggs, Idaho 83422. Electronic comments can be sent to [comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-intermtn-caribou-targhee@fs.fed.us). For further information on the proposed Plan Amendment or the process, contact Megan Bogle, Forest Planner, Caribou-Targhee National Forest at (208)354-6613 or click on the “NEPA documents for projects” link on the Forest website: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r4/caribou-targhee/projects/>.

Sincerely,



BRENT L. LARSON  
Forest Supervisor

