

On Monday, the Forest Service published its [proposed new planning rule](#).

The planning process for national forests has been in a kind of limbo since the end of the Clinton administration. The National Forest Management Act requires the preparation and periodic revision of land management plans for each national forest. The first planning rule was issued in 1982. As it was leaving office, the Clinton administration finalized a revised version, emphasizing environmental sustainability over extractive uses. The GW Bush administration refused to implement that rule. It twice issued its own planning rule, but both times the [federal courts held that the new rule had been improperly adopted](#).

I have not yet read through the draft rule. The [USDA press release](#) says its highlights include:

- A more effective and efficient framework that would allow adaptive land management planning in the face of climate change and other stressors.
- Increased requirements for public involvement and collaboration throughout all stages of land management planning.
- Improved ability to respond to climate change and other stressors through provisions to restore and maintain healthy and resilient ecosystems.
- Increased protections for water resources and watersheds.
- More effective and proactive requirements to provide for diverse native plant and animal species.
- Provisions to guide the contributions of a National Forest or National Grassland to social and economic sustainability.
- Updated provisions for sustainable land, water and air-based recreation.
- Requirements to provide for integrated resource management of a range of multiple uses and values including outdoor recreation, range, timber, water, wildlife, wilderness, energy, mining, and ecosystem services.
- New requirements for a local and landscape-scale monitoring program that are based on the latest science.

Initial reaction from environmental groups is skeptical. [Earthjustice says](#) the proposed rule “delivers on theories but misses on accountability and delivery.” Dave Iverson, one of the founders of [Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics](#), writes that it “fails as adaptive management,” despite agency claims. [Defenders of Wildlife describes](#) the proposal as weakening protections for wildlife because it gives individual forest managers more discretion in implementing NFMA’s viability mandate. [The Wilderness Society praises the framework](#) but says it needs more work and critical details remain to be filled in. See also

coverage in the [New York Times](#), [Washington Post](#), and [Los Angeles Times](#).