

Forest Planning 101

What is a forest plan?

Forest Plans are like a master plan for a national forest. The Forest Service partitions each forest into different management areas. Each management area has its own management objectives, permissions, and restrictions. For instance, one management area may emphasize timber harvest while another is managed for wilderness. Forest plans tend to have a life-span of decades. So this is a crucial time to get involved. The Nez Perce-Clearwater Forest Plan was last revised in 1987.

What is a wilderness area?

Designated wilderness areas are protected by an act of Congress. Wilderness areas are set aside for our enjoyment of nature, to protect wildlife habitat, and preserve a part of our natural world for the future. They are open to hiking, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, and other traditional uses. These areas are off-limits to motorized and mechanized travel, logging, and mining.

What is a “recommended” wilderness area?

The Forest Service may propose new wilderness areas through the forest planning process. Proposed wilderness areas are called “recommended wilderness areas” in the Forest Plan because only Congress can permanently designate wilderness areas. Forest Service recommendations for new wilderness areas are highly influenced by public support for an individual area.

What is a wild and scenic river?

Designated wild and scenic rivers are also protected by law. They are off-limits to dams, impoundments, and in some wild and scenic river corridors, in-stream mining is not allowed. Rivers designated as wild and scenic must be kept in a free-flowing condition.

What is a “suitable” wild and scenic river?

The Forest Service may also propose new wild and scenic rivers through the forest planning process. Proposed wild and scenic rivers are called “suitable wild and scenic rivers” in the Forest Plan. Free-flowing rivers with unique features or “outstandingly remarkable values” like high-quality fish habitat, white water recreation opportunities, or scenic views are eligible. Public support is weighed by Forest Service officials in deciding whether to identify a river as “suitable” for wild and scenic rivers classification. An act of Congress is required to permanently protect a river as wild and scenic.