



Forest Plan Symposium

Response to Audience Questions

Bridger-Teton National Forest | February 2024

Introduction: The purpose of the Forest Plan Symposium was to provide an opportunity to learn about the overall national forest planning process and how to effectively engage. Forest planning is complex thus the symposium strived to provide the background information BEFORE diving into the Bridger-Teton National Forest planning process. Most of the audience questions were specifically about the Bridger-Teton National Forest process and could not be answered by the panel who are not involved with the Bridger-Teton. We don't have all the answers as forest planning is just beginning on the Bridger-Teton Forest, but responses to questions are provided to the best of our ability.

Topic I. The National Forest Planning Process

Q: *Who is the final adjudicator on what is included in the plan? The FS charter is contradictory between conservation and resource extraction, so it seems that whoever has the final decision has considerable influence in the interpretation of the purpose of national forests.*

- * **Response:** The local Forest Supervisor is the person who decides what direction is contained in the revised Forest Plan. Objections to the Forest Plan are reviewed by an independent team at the regional level before a final decision is made. As noted by the panel, the 2012 planning rule recognizes the multiple-use [mission](#) of the agency but emphasizes that the mission is within the context of maintaining ecological integrity. Achieving ecological, social, and economic sustainability is challenging. The appropriate balance is likely to vary among and even within a National Forest given its history and specific resources.

Q: *Is planning done at a Federal level now and not at a local level?*

- * **Response:** Forest Plan decisions and all public engagement and relationships will continue to occur at the local level. What has changed is the establishment of Planning Services Organizations. These groups are integrated within the Forest Service to provide expertise, process management, and stable staffing to support local Forest staff so that planning efforts are more efficient. The Bridger-Teton is supported by the Mountain Planning Service Group whose members are physically located throughout the Intermountain and Rocky Mountain regions and include some former Bridger-Teton Forest employees.

Q: *How long does this process usually take before there is a final forest plan?*

- * **Response:** Forest Plans typically have taken up to 7 years to complete. A goal for the Planning Services Organizations is to improve the efficiency of forest planning so the development of forest plan components and the accompanying Environmental Impact Statement can be completed in 4 years.

Q: *Please provide a link to the plan rules.*

- * **Response:** The 2012 Planning Rule provides the framework to guide the revision or amendment of forest plans. A direct link to the Planning Rule can be found at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule>. Additionally, extensive information about the Planning Rule can be found [here](#)

Q: *Does this halt any projects or NEPA work? Do you need a new forest plan to move forward with anything that needs NEPA?*

- * **Response:** Revising a forest plan does not halt or delay any on-going projects or project-level NEPA. Projects must be consistent with the current Forest Plan until a revised plan is approved.

Q: *How does someone go about getting on one of these national advisory councils?*

- * **Response:** Three of the five panelists participated on the National Federal Advisory Committee to develop recommendations and products to support implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule. The committee was active between 2012 and 2018. More information about this committee's work is available at this [link](#)

Q: *What recommendations do you have for non-profit organizations to encourage productive collaboration while still respecting the mission of the organization and desires of their boards?*

- * **Response:** Panelists noted that non-profits can play an important role by helping organize public meetings, gathering feedback from citizens through their relationships, and connecting with county commissioners. Like any public, non-profits should strive to approach issues with curiosity. Advocating for an action from only one interest often presents the Forest Service with an impossible task.

Topic 2. Panel composition

Q: *How did you pick the panel members?*

Q: *Why is there no motorized representation on the panel? I am worried that motorized folks will not have a voice in the process. We would like to see the full diversity of voices representing human and non-human powered outdoor enthusiasts.*

Q: *Why is there no wildlife representative on the panel? I am worried that the BT will not emphasize the importance of wildlife in the future plan.*

Response: The panelists were selected by Bridger-Teton Forest staff due to their knowledge of forest planning and public engagement beyond the Bridger-Teton. None were selected to represent a specific interest nor are any of them directly involved with the B-T forest planning effort. Three of the panelists were members of the national committee who developed recommendations for implementation of the 2012 Planning Rule and have continued to participate in planning efforts around the country. Due to this experience, they were able to provide valuable insights and lessons so we might all be better informed before the Bridger-Teton forest planning process gets going. The student was selected to offer insights on involving younger people in the process. The Shoshone-Bannock Tribal panelist was included since recognizing treaty rights is a requirement in forest planning and is a perspective many people may not be aware of. Bridger-Teton Forest staff understand there are many interests (motorized recreation, wildlife, water, fire, etc.) that want to ensure their voices are included during the planning process. We encourage all interested people to sign up to receive direct email updates about Bridger-Teton public engagement opportunities as they arise via this [link](#).

Topic 3. Bridger-Teton Tribal interests

Q: *How many Native American tribes have recognized connections with the Bridger Teton lands?*

Q: *There are dozens of Tribes that have historic and modern ties to what's now the Bridger Teton. How will the forest plan weigh and incorporate the variety of different Tribal voices, especially when they differ?*

Q: *What exactly do various tribes want from this planning process? what are the most important needs? Are there particular issues that are tribal specific (sacred grounds protection, etc) or is this more about having a native voice in the planning process at all?*

Response: The Bridger-Teton National Forest hired a tribal liaison in the spring of 2023 to coordinate efforts with the various tribes. Numerous tribes have expressed interest in the Bridger-Teton National Forest, although the desired level of involvement varies. Three tribes are deeply engaged (Shoshone-Bannock, Eastern Shoshone, and Northern Arapaho). It is too early to tell what the desires of each Tribe might be and whether they differ significantly. However, one common interest we have heard is that tribes want to ensure that they are able to continue traditional hunting, fishing, gathering, and ceremonial practices in accordance with their treaty rights. Panelist Dr. Martin Nie suggested the following website as a good reference for tribal information <https://narf.org/resources/land-co-management-repository/>

Topic 4. Bridger-Teton Forest public input process

Q: *How will the BT ensure that the public comment periods and other opportunities for input are shared as widely as possible? Will there be any other in person meetings for the public to give input and feedback? The public is being encouraged to communicate with the Forest but where should we go to provide input? What is the deadline for submitting public comments?*

- * **Response:** The best way to ensure you are notified about public meetings and comment opportunities is to sign up to receive email alerts. To sign up, click on this [link](#). There are no documents currently available for public input as the process is just beginning. The first opportunity for public input is expected to kick off in February 2024 with a short comment form that will be distributed to gather people's initial thoughts about trends in ecological, social, and

economic conditions as well as important topics for the future of the Forest. This will be followed by public meetings tentatively planned for March 2024. The Draft Assessment will be the first document available that initiates the forest planning process. It will be available for a 30-day public comment period and will be available in spring 2024.

Q: How are you going to involve all stakeholders in the planning process? Will motorized recreation interests be included? What is the process to include different user groups to find common ground? We're especially concerned about motorized recreation.

- * **Response:** There will be multiple opportunities for all interested citizens to be involved in the Bridger-Teton Forest planning process over the coming years. A "Public Engagement and Inclusion Strategy" will be posted on Bridger-Teton Forest Plan [webpage](#) later in February. This document will outline how the Forest intends to involve all interests in crafting updated direction for the Forest.

Q: There are 2 collaboratives on the forest that have met regularly with the forest and staff. Why can't the forest schedule times with these groups as they know we are here and want to be involved.

Q: Other National Forests rely heavily on the work of collaborative groups to guide decisions. Will you be forming a group?

- * **Response:** The Forest intends to work with existing collaborative groups to assist with organizing public meetings and gather feedback through their relationships. Forming a new collaborative group around forest planning is not being considered at this time due to the difficulty of asking a small group to represent the incredibly wide diversity of interests and groups who want to ensure their voices are heard. Other techniques can be used to foster common learning and agreement. We will be seeking additional feedback on desired engagement techniques as part of the comment form that will be available later in February.

Q: Will the Forest Service invest in polling or focus groups to generate equitable interest and opinions from the public?

- * **Response:** The Forest has been working with counties and the University of Wyoming to conduct a random, statistically relevant social survey to solicit resident input about forest planning. The results of this survey will be presented as part of public meetings tentatively planned in March. The Forest also intends to hold webinars and discussions around topics of high public interest as the process unfolds.

Q: How will the forest make an effort to engage historically underrepresented community members (such as Jackson's Latinx community) with the planning process? It was mentioned that the world is run by people who show up, but not everyone has the privilege to be able to show up.

- * **Responses:** All voices including those from the Latinx community are very important in the forest planning process. As the panelists mentioned, the 2012 Planning Rule places high emphasis on public engagement from all interested citizens, not just those who show up. The "Public Engagement and Inclusion Strategy" will outline strategies for inclusion of the Latinx community, including but not limited to working with Camina Conmiga, Voices JH, and Combs Outdoors. We invite you to share your thoughts on how we might best engage with the Latinx community through the comment form in February.

Topic 5. Bridger-Teton Forest planning overall process

Q: What are some of the major issues and questions related to the BT NF?

Q: In 1989 timber and livestock were probably major drivers for the planning process. Today recreational activities have outpaced both of those along with natural ecosystem recovery (large predators). How will this plan attempt to recognize these changes?

- * **Response:** It is currently too early to confirm what the major Bridger-Teton issues might be. The Draft Assessment Report (available in spring 2024) will be the first document that discusses major topics for the Bridger-Teton. A key aspect of this report is highlighting what has changed since the current Forest Plan was approved in 1990 and where updated direction is needed in the revised forest plan.

Q: Who will be included in the BT Planning Team?

- * **Response:** The Bridger-Teton Forest Planning effort is led by a core team that includes the Forest Supervisor, deputy Forest Supervisor, planning staff officer, forest planner, public engagement coordinator, tribal liaison, ecosystem staff officer, and a GIS specialist. An extended team of Forest resource specialists as well as specialists with the Mountain Planning Service Group are also part of the team.

Q: *The Bridger Teton Forest has mostly respected multi-use. Will this continue in the implementation of this Forest plan?*

- * **Response:** The Bridger-Teton Forest has worked with numerous partners to promote responsible and respectful use over the years. These on-going efforts will continue to be vitally important for implementation long into the future.

Topic 6. Bridger-Teton Forest planning specific topics

Q: *Climate change has become a bigger issue since 1990. What tools are used to ensure the forest plan contains adaptive or preventative measures to address imminent changes to our ecosystems, economies, etc. under a shifting climate?*

- * **Response:** As noted by the panel, addressing climate change is required as part of forest planning. The draft assessment report identifies climate change as a key driver and provides information about how changes in climate are affecting various forest resources. The emphasis on monitoring and adaptation in forest planning are important tools for adjusting management over time.

Q: *Why create a new plan that could create more enforcement hardship when the BT already struggles with enforcement.*

Q: *How will the forest plan change the rules for summer home permits?*

- * **Response:** Forest Plans establish strategic programmatic management direction such as defining the management emphasis for different areas of the forest acknowledging existing conditions like summer home tracts. Forest Plans do not establish specific regulations or rules for permit administration. To learn more about what a Forest Plan does and doesn't do, check out information at this [link](#)

Q: *The amount of motorized activity seems to grow every year. Will there be a move to open more acreage to motorized off-road travel? While I generally support inclusive multiple use by diverse user groups, I have become frustrated at increasing illegal ATV and dirt bike use. How can we enforce motorized restrictions and develop a self-regulating ethic in motorized users? Will the forest plan include transportation planning? We want to assure a reasonable separation between motorized and non-motorized use for safe and enjoyable recreation.*

- * **Response:** Forest Plans do not produce travel plans that specify routes and areas for summer or winter motorized use. That said, forest plans play an important role in setting the framework for subsequent travel plans by identifying the management emphasis, desired recreation opportunity spectrum, and suitable uses for specific areas of the forest, along with standards and guidelines that influence travel decisions (e.g. seasonal wildlife restrictions).

Q: *Is the BT aware of the amount of beetle kill near Togwotee and can the forest work with the Shoshone on a joint management plan?*

Q: *Uncontained human feces seems to one of the BT's persistent problems. Are more vault toilets the only way to deal with this? Couldn't the BT office sell personal poop disposal systems at a discount?*

Q: *There are strong voices wanting more and more recreation and it all impacts wildlife and habitat. How does balance, sustainability, ecological integrity play into this? Does forest planning include prescriptive/ enforceable visitor capacity limits to manage resource impacts?*

Q: *What is the Forest considering to address the topic of safety in recreational trapping and snaring? Will the Forest consider trap-free areas to protect all of us and our wild neighbors?*

Q: *With the attempt to draw down winter supplemental feeding, how will the forest manage the additional need of winter forage by wildlife and address the possible conflict between wildlife and domestic livestock's need for forage?*

- * **Response:** Insect and disease (beetle kill), recreation opportunities and impacts, and winter wildlife habitat needs are all important topics that will be addressed in forest planning, beginning with the assessment report that describes existing conditions and trends. It is too early to know how the revised plan components might address these topics. As noted earlier, forest plans establish strategic programmatic direction. To learn more about what a Forest Plan does and doesn't do, check out information at this [link](#)

Topic 7. Bridger-Teton project specific questions

Q: *Concern about winter range closures that restrict access to legal hunting areas*

Q: *Is funding available to provide more dispersed campsites in the Gros Ventre and Curtis Canyon to meet the growing demand?*

Q: *How much will it cost to complete the redesign of the Cache Creek trailhead and how long will it take?*

Response: These questions concern specific projects that have already being implemented or are currently in the works on the Jackson Ranger District. Please contact the District Ranger or staff on the Ranger District if you would like to discuss these projects.