

Forest Conservation Campaign

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP PROTECT OUR NATIONAL FORESTS

The U.S. Forest Service manages 175 national forests and grasslands spread across 190 million acres in 42 states and Puerto Rico. The National Forest System encompasses habitats ranging from alpine tundra to tropical rainforest, from native grasslands to wetlands. These magnificent landscapes support diverse ecosystems and an incredible array of fish, wildlife and plants including iconic animals such as antelope, bison, bighorn sheep, elk and cutthroat trout. Additionally, the streams, lakes, and rivers on Forest Service land provide clean water to about 66 million Americans. Millions rely on these lands for wildlife viewing, hunting and angling (according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation, outdoor recreation contributes \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy).



Aspen stand, Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, WY

Help Protect Wildlife On Our National Forests

The Obama Administration has released the draft planning rule that will determine the future of every acre of national forest land – and the fish and wildlife that depend on these lands to survive. Unfortunately, the proposed rule fails to require critical, concrete protections for water quality and wildlife. The proposed rule would:

- Roll back existing safeguards for wildlife conservation and no longer require the Forest Service to maintain healthy and sustainable fish and wildlife populations for every species in our national forests.
- Leave the decision of whether or not to maintain healthy, viable populations of many imperiled wildlife species at the discretion of individual forest managers, leaving the fate of hundreds of species uncertain.
- Allow individual forest managers the discretion to “give up” on protecting many needy species without facing accountability to the public.

What You Can Do

Your voice is crucial to strengthen this important rule. **Please join us in urging the Forest Service to strengthen their draft rule.** We need your help to urge the Obama administration to set binding standards for safeguarding water quality and fish and wildlife habitat. Through May 16 the public is able to provide comments on the proposed rule and draft environmental impact statement.

- **Submit a comment** – Visit www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule to submit your own comment to the Forest Service.
- **Attend a meeting in your area** – To find details about the Forest Service planning rule public meetings around the country and learn how you can participate, visit www.fs.usda.gov/planningrule.
- **Write a letter to the editor** – Help call attention to the need for strong wildlife safeguards on the national forests in your area by writing a letter to the editor of your local paper. Remember to include your email address, phone number, and town and don't forget to keep it brief. Most newspapers have strong word limits of 150-200 words. Visit www.defenders.org/ourforests for sample letters and additional tips.
- **Contact your local and federal elected officials** – Our national forests are cherished by millions of Americans and vital to communities all across the country. Ask your elected officials to – local, state, and federal – to urge the Administration to come out with a strong rule that protects water and wildlife.

Help Protect Our National Forests

Sample Talking Points

Following are sample talking points you can use to craft your comments on the rule, communications with your local officials, or in your letters to your local newspapers. Please mix and match and pull from various sources. Remember, it is essential to make the letter personal. Use the points most relevant to your interests to add to your personal messages about the importance of strengthening the water and wildlife protection provisions within the new National Forest Management Act planning rule.

Key Sample Messaging Points

- Our national forests have been a treasured American legacy since they were established more than a century ago. They provide vital fish and wildlife habitat, clean drinking water and world-class outdoor recreation opportunities for millions.
- Unfortunately, the proposed planning rule is significantly weaker than current wildlife standards and moves away from accountability and enforcement.
- The Forest Service has allowed itself significant discretion in all decision-making regarding wildlife and habitat conservation. This will likely lead to more political rather than science based decisions.
- Despite this administration's declarations of support of sound science in decision-making processes, this proposed rule gives only lip service to the role of science, making it only one of the things forest managers should "consider".
- The Forest Service must strengthen this rule to include mandatory wildlife sustainability standards and monitoring protocols, and clear accountability measures.
- The rule also must guarantee safe, clean water by creating enforceable management standards to protect and restore streams, rivers and watersheds, which provide drinking water to millions of Americans.
- Failure to include enforceable standards will jeopardize fish and wildlife populations and clean water, and threaten the recreational opportunities and other important benefits provided by these lands.

Elements to Include Based on Your Interests

- **Protect Fish and Wildlife** – Our national forests provide habitat for more than 5,000 species of fish and wildlife and more than 10,000 plant species, including iconic animals such as pronghorn antelope, bison, bighorn sheep, elk and cutthroat trout. *[TIP: discuss wildlife found on national forests in your state or share a favorite wildlife experience on a national forest.]*
- **Preserve Water and Watersheds** – National forests provide safe drinking water to 66 million Americans. Adequate monitoring and protecting of the streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands will help maintain a clean water supply for people and aquatic animals. *[TIP: include information on national forest watersheds in your state.]*
- **Save America's Outdoor Legacy** – Employing long-term, sustainable management practices will ensure that our national forests offer recreation and economic opportunities for generations. In 2006, wildlife watching's contributed \$45.7 billion to the U.S. economy and \$76 billion is spent annually on hunting and fishing. The array of outdoor activities including camping, hiking, hunting, kayaking and canoeing contribute \$730 billion annually to the U.S. economy according to the Outdoor Industry Foundation. These activities are not only part of America's outdoor heritage, they are an integral component of our nation's economy – in particular the economies of thousands of communities near our national forests. *[TIP: Mention if you are in an outdoor recreation related business or share stories of experiences you have had visiting our national forests.]*



Eagle Creek, Lincoln National Forest, NM