

U.S. Forest Service Information for FY15 ECCR Annual Report

Contact: Joe Carbone, Assistant Director for NEPA 202-205-0884 jcarbone@fs.fed.us

The U.S. Forest Service is committed to public engagement in planning and environmental analysis under the National Forest Management Act and the National Environmental Policy Act. A particular emphasis has been given to using collaboration and ensuring success of the 2012 Land Management Planning Rule. Five noteworthy efforts in FY-2015 were the Leaders as Conveners Workshops, the National Collaboration Cadre, National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule, Electronic Management of National Environmental Policy Act, and Talking Points. All of these efforts enhance the agency's capacity and experience in building a culture of collaboration for natural resource management through planning and project-level public engagement. The Forest Service continues to make collaboration part of the agency's planning and decision-making fabric.

Leaders as Conveners Workshops are practical, hands-on, three-day workshops designed for leaders and influencers who want to learn collaborative leadership tools that engage and activate diverse stakeholders, both internally and externally. In 2015 there were sessions held both in the field and at Grey Towers Training Facility in Milford, PA. Employees from across the Forest Service attended including many decision makers working to improve their collaborative skills. Participants explore a new leadership mode well suited to addressing the adaptive challenges facing the Forest Service today. This helps lay the foundation for satisfying and enduring ways of working together in the future.

The National Collaboration Cadre (Cadre) works with National Forests, their communities, and interested stakeholders to help them engage in effective collaboration. The Cadre offers a unique collaborative approach that models and blends the perspectives of the Forest Service, communities, and academic research through the guidance of experienced collaboration advocates. The Cadre responded to nine requests for collaboration assistance in FY15. The Cadre tailored training and assistance for six national forests (twice on one unit) and responded to two regional requests.

Two units requested and received assistance for collaborative groups working with them. The Cadre provided these groups with diagnostic analyses and capacity assessments to identify and address issues. Additional Cadre support was provided to one community collaborative group to help monitor its progress. The other unit requested collaborative assistance for its sustainable recreation efforts.

Three units beginning forest plan revision requested "Understanding Collaboration" trainings. Two of the three units were also provided assistance in organizing for plan revision public engagement. Coaching and training was also provided to one forest supervisor to address immediate issues on the unit. The Southern Region requested training for the Regional Public Affairs Officers Workshop and for the Regional Planners and NEPA Specialists meeting.

The National Advisory Committee for Implementation of the National Forest System Land Management Planning Rule (FACA Committee), initially chartered in early 2012, largely completed its second term during FY15. The FACA Committee met 3 times in person during the year and conducted numerous meetings by telephone to augment its meetings.

The FACA Committee provided specific recommendations to the Forest Service on a number of core issues for forest planning. For example, the Committee identified the turnover of staff and leadership as a barrier to good communication between the agency and the public during the planning process and offered several recommendations for approaches to mitigating this impact. The FACA Committee continues to focus on this issue as foundational to a consistent and strong process. The Committee also began an effort to evaluate the assessment reports that several national forest teams developed. The goal of this effort is to identify ways to strengthen assessments to support planning as effectively as possible.

Notably, the FACA Committee helped the Forest Service with implementation of new approaches to typically conflict-prone areas of planning related to wilderness and species conservation. A great deal of effort has also been focused on public communication, including strategies for effective outreach to underserved people including minority populations and young people.

The Electronic Management of the National Environmental Policy Act (eMNEPA) reduces the NEPA and planning compliance workload and improves effectiveness in public engagement by making planning and environmental analysis documents readily available. The eMNEPA effort saved approximately \$37 million in FY 2015 through efficiencies and reduced work hours needed to prepare reports, mail documents, manage mailing lists, and analyze public comments for approximately 2,000 decisions. The program reached over 300,000 subscribers on 900+ projects, received over 72,000 electronic letters, and enabled the public to view and download over 5 million documents on the web in 2015. The eMNEPA tools are tightly integrated with each other, other Forest Service applications, and other Federal agency applications. All have overlapping user communities and support in order to eliminate redundancy and reduce implementation time and costs. Tools include:

1. *Planning Appeals Litigation System* tracks and reports project level information and automates a standard Schedule of Proposed Actions for all agency units so the public is continuously kept up to date on proposed projects and plans. PALS serves as a central workspace for building NEPA project records and accessing NEPA assistive information. PALS user base extends to all regional offices, national forests and grasslands, and ranger districts; over 2,000 users.
2. *Comment Analysis and Response Application* is the Agency's web-based solution for receiving, analyzing, and responding to public comments. The application reduces time and cost through automation and standardization and facilitates sharing information across the Agency and with the public.

3. *Mailing List Management* takes NEPA staff out of the business of managing multiple, decentralized mailing lists. It allows field units to automate communications and allow the public to sign up for the types of information that they want to receive.
4. *Document Management and Distribution* provides behind the scenes document storage and management services to eMNEPA applications to streamline the creation, management and distribution of complete NEPA project files, and it enables publishing NEPA information to the public web.

Talking Points Collaborative Mapping (TPCM) is being used to bring a new dimension to the Forest Service public participation toolkit. Developed collaboratively with the US Geological Survey for the needs of the Forest Service, TPCM is an easy to use, highly configurable, web-based *public participation GIS* site (or PPGIS) providing unique spatial and learning capabilities for receiving, analyzing, reporting and integrating public comments and photos into various National Forest and Grassland planning and management activities. More than a dozen National Forests have used TPCM for public participation in difference applications during its testing and implementation phases. Expected future upgrades include access through Windows, Android, and Apple mobile devices and the Forest Service's comment analysis system for analyzing public comments.