

Forest Plan attempts to bring balance to basin

By Kathryn Reed

People have plenty of ideas how the 150,000 acres in the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit of the U.S. Forest Service should be managed. The agency received about 18,500 comments on the environmental document for the Forest Plan.

While wilderness areas and snowmobiling were some of the more contentious issues during public hearings, they did not dominate the comments. No new wilderness areas have been added. The Forest Service wants to find a way for snowmobilers and non-motorized recreationists to play outdoors without annoying each other.



Rabe Meadow in Stateline is a small part of what the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit oversees. Photo/LTN

Jeff Marsolais, deputy forest supervisor, said the key with the plan is to bring balance to the various needs of the people using the forest, as well as the animals and plants that call it home.

“One thing holds true, there are folks on both sides of pretty

much all of the issues. It gets back to balance," Marsolais said. Some want more aggressive management for wildfire protection, others want less intrusive approaches; some want less recreation, others want more.

Some of the comments pointed out science the Forest Service was not using. Marsolais said his team listened and more science is part of the document.

The Forest Plan is the guiding document for the local Forest Service office for the next 15 years. Comments are being accepted on the final environmental impact statement until Jan. 21.

The previous Forest Plan had 21 management areas; this one has four. This will make things more efficient with less needless redundancy.

The Stanford Rock Backcountry Area, which is approximately 3,800 acres between Blackwood and Ward canyons, has been added.

"People who go to those special places want a little bit more solitude and not necessarily have it be wilderness," Marsolais told *Lake Tahoe News*.

One thing the public will notice is an increase of 5 percent of the land being designated for recreation. This could mean various things – a few more parking spaces or developed campsites.

"Just because the plan authorizes it doesn't mean we will do it," Marsolais said.

This plan is not about projects. It's more of a big-picture planning document that outlines allowable uses.

This Forest Plan is long overdue. Work on it started in the early 2000s. Twice the Forest Service was sued – in 2005 and 2008. This meant starting over to come up with a planning tool

that would not be litigated. That happened in 2012.

New to this document compared to others is how climate change could affect the forest lands.

“This Forest Plan considers the effect of changing climate and establishes standards and guides for species management and vegetation management,” Marsolais said. “This plan creates a space for us to be more adaptable to use new science or assessments for how to do projects on the ground.”

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Notes:

- The Forest Service will have two webinars to explain the final plan, highlight changes from the draft and outline the remainder of the plan revision process. The first will be Dec. 9 from 5-6pm. The second will be Jan. 14 from 2-3pm. The webinars will feature a brief presentation, followed by a question and answer period, and they will be archived on the LTBMU website for later viewing.
- The plan, final EIS, draft record of decision and webinar info is online.
- CDs or print copies are available at 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe or by calling (530) 543.2694.
- A record of decision could be signed in the spring, at which time the document takes effect.