

**BACK COUNTRY HORSEMEN OF NEW MEXICO
PUBLIC LANDS/LEGISLATIVE REPORT
DECEMBER, 2017**

More on National Forest Plans

Forest Plans govern the administration and management of National Forests for 20 to 30 years. All five National Forests in New Mexico are presently undertaking the revision of their plans. Recreation, trails, wilderness areas and roadless areas are all part of the planning process. Here is the current status of all five forest plans:

Cibola National Forest

Last year the FS released its Preliminary Draft Alternatives for Cibola. The Draft Plan will be released this coming spring. At that point, there will be public meetings and a time period in which to comment. One issue to be addressed is the amount of forest land that needs to be protected as wilderness. Trail location, usage and maintenance will also be an issue in this and all the other forests.

Santa Fe National Forest

The FS will release its Draft Plan in early 2018 at which time there will be public meetings and a comment period. The Protect Pecos Coalition is working to address the protection of roadless areas adjoining the Pecos Wilderness and will push to have this issue addressed in the Plan.

Carson National Forest

The FS has recently released a Preliminary Draft Plan with “alternative themes” and is expected to release a Draft Plan before the end of the year. At that time there will be opportunities for public comment. So far the Plan does not provide a wilderness inventory and evaluation, and this definitely needs to be added.

On a related matter, the FS has proposed reducing the number of eligible wild and scenic river segments in the Carson from 103 to 48. This has engendered significant opposition including from Senators Udall and Heinrich and Congressman Lujan. See the attached letter on page 3.

Gila National Forest

The FS is now evaluating wilderness areas and developing alternatives for its new plan. A Draft Plan is expected sometime in 2018, again with opportunity for public comment.

Lincoln National Forest

The Lincoln National Forest will be the last NM national forest to complete a revised Forest Plan. The FS is still in an information gathering stage and will use that information to prepare an environmental assessment.

Chapter Input

I would like to recommend that each BCH chapter designate a representative to lead a chapter review of proposed Plans for the forests in which the chapter helps maintain trails. This person would work with me and be the focal point for BCH comments on the Plans. Now is the time to get organized for reviewing the Plans to be released in 2018. Please let me know if your chapter is able to do this.

BLM Resource Management Plan Revisions

The Carlsbad, Farmington and Tri-County (Las Cruces) BLM Field Offices are currently engaged in revisions of their Resource Management Plans, which are similar to Forest Plans. An important component of the plan revision process is the evaluation of BLM lands with wilderness characteristics and the determination whether to manage such lands to protect their wilderness values. The public will have opportunities to comment on these evaluations and other plan revisions sometime in 2018. If any chapters are involved with BLM lands in any of these districts, please let me know.

Contact

I look forward to speaking with all BCH members about public lands issues. Please call or e-mail me anytime.

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Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 15, 2017

Mr. James Duran
Forest Supervisor, Carson National Forest
208 Cruz Alta Road
Taos, NM 87571

Dear Mr. Duran:

New Mexico's waterways—no matter how small—are often the lifeblood our communities and our traditions. It has come to our attention that the Carson National Forest is reviewing the Wild and Scenic River eligibility of multiple segments of rivers within the Forest's jurisdiction. Local news outlets have reported that after surveying 217 river segments, the Carson National Forest's current proposal is to move from 103 eligible 'wild and scenic' river segments to 48, a cutting in half the number of eligible segments which will receive protection.

Reducing the number of eligible rivers as well as deciding to reassess many previously assessed rivers is concerning in light of the limited public input the Forest has sought. In making these changes, we believe it is important that you increase public involvement to hear from the communities located in and around the Carson National Forest and the rivers being evaluated. We request that the Forest Service extend the comment period for an additional 30 days beyond the current November 15th deadline and that the Forest provide additional public outreach, with the public about the wild and scenic river eligibility review and the Forest's findings.

In addition, it is our understanding that while a segment of river is awaiting designation and is deemed 'eligible' by a federal land management agency, the agency must to work to maintain and manage the free flowing nature and outstandingly remarkable values contained in the river segment. If the Forest Service now believes there are large numbers of rivers which no longer have the outstandingly remarkable values previous Forest evaluations found, we request that the Forest Service provide clear justifications as to how these rivers lost those values and what changed circumstances justify the downgrade. In addition, we would also like to know what the agency should have done better to protect those values, so we can assure we do not continue to lose those values over time.

We appreciate your stewardship of our public lands on behalf of the American people and look forward to your swift response.

Sincerely,



Tom Udall
United States Senator



Martin Heinrich
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Representative