

## Equestrian Input Needed for US Forest Service Planning Forums

**Back Country Horsemen of America encourages horseback riders to help preserve wilderness areas for recreational use.**

*Edited Press Release*

March 8, 2010

A recent press release from the US Forest Service (USFS) announced a series of events to provide opportunities for public discussion on the development of a new Forest Service Land and Resource Management Planning Rule (planning rule). The Forest Service will host a national science forum, three national roundtables and nine regional roundtables.

To the average horseback rider, this probably sounds like a real yawning, good time. However, this is the announcement of some of the most important meetings the USFS will hold this year, perhaps in this decade. To help horseback riders and trail users understand how important these meetings are to their future ability to enjoy these public lands, Back Country Horsemen of America (BCHA) has prepared an instructional memo that will offer advice on how to effectively comment at these meetings or online. To obtain a complete copy of this paper, go to [www.backcountryhorse.com](http://www.backcountryhorse.com) and under Current Reports on the home page, select "Comments FS Planning Rule."

BCHA Senior Advisor for Wilderness, Recreation and Trails, Dennis Dailey noted that the USFS says the planning rule is "needed to guide land managers" ... and provide "the opportunity to help protect, reconnect, and restore national forests and national grasslands for the benefit of human communities and natural resources," and that the rule "will allow the Agency to integrate forest restoration, watershed protection, climate resilience, wildlife conservation, the need to support vibrant local communities, ..." The BCHA points out that planning rules since 2000 have grossly neglected a very important responsibility – to provide quality recreation opportunities, including equestrian use, as required by both the Multiple-Use Sustained-Yield Act and the National Forest Management Act. No other resource, service or product derived from Forest System lands touches the lives of more Americans nor has greater opportunity to foster citizen support than does the opportunity to choose from the variety of recreation settings necessary to enjoy a quality recreation experience.

Since the 2000 planning rule (and subsequent proposed revisions) was approved, guidance to address the recreation resource has been conspicuously absent from the planning direction. As a result, forest plan revisions that BCHA has reviewed lack a clearly defined strategy for integrating recreation into the forest's overall activities. Without a clearly defined strategy – including an inventory of opportunities available and assessment of future demand for those opportunities – it is impossible to determine whether proposed actions "to integrate forest restoration, watershed protection, climate resilience, wildlife conservation" will in fact "support vibrant local communities," provide the optimum mix of recreation opportunities for the American public (which of course goes way beyond the local community), and avoid 'unintended consequences' such as those that BCHA has witnessed during implementation of the Travel Management Rule.

The USFS press release stated, "We encourage broad participation in the creation of our new planning rule," said USDA Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell. "Through collaboration we will be able to better address the current and future needs of the National Forest System such as restoration, protecting watersheds, addressing climate change, sustaining local economies, improving collaboration, and working across landscapes."

Following the meetings, notes will be posted on the planning rule website to allow for further feedback. Summaries of the presentations and discussions in the science forum and roundtables, along with the individual comments received during the 60-day formal comment period on the Notice of Intent, will be used to develop the proposed rule and a draft environmental impact statement.

The meetings announced include:  
National Science Forum March 29 and 30, 2010, in Washington, DC.

National roundtables April 1 and 2, April 20 and 21, and May 11 and 12, 2010, in Washington, DC. Additionally, nine regional roundtables in the following locations:

- \* Pacific Northwest Region (Region 6), Portland, OR on April 6, 2010;
- \* Pacific Southwest Region (Region 5), Sacramento, CA on April 6, 2010;
- \* Intermountain Region (Region 4), Salt Lake City, UT on April 8, 2010;
- \* Rocky Mountain Region, (Region 2), Lakewood, CO on April 12, 2010;



- \* Northern Region (Region 1), Missoula, MT on April 13, 2010;
- \* Alaska Region (Region 10), Juneau, AK on April 13, 2010;
- \* Southern Region (Region 8), Atlanta, GA during the week of April 12, 2010 (exact date to be determined);
- \* Eastern Region (Region 9), Chicago, IL during the week of April 28 (exact date to be determined); and
- \* Southwestern Region (Region 3), Albuquerque, NM on April 28, 2010.
- \* Region 2 will host additional meetings on April 14 in Cheyenne, WY and on April 21 in Rapid City, SD.

Webcasting may also be available for selected meetings; please check the planning rule website for the most up-to-date information.

To encourage widespread participation the Forest Service is using new media tools in conjunction with the public meetings. Please visit <http://blogs.usda.gov/usdablogs/planningrule> to participate in the Forest Service web-based planning rule blog.