

Developing a National Best Management Practices Program for the U.S. Forest Service

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ABSTRACT

Over the past several years, the U.S. Forest Service (FS) has been updating guidance for national best management practices (BMP) used to administer its nonpoint pollution control strategy on National Forest System (NFS) lands. The intent of the FS National BMP Program is to simultaneously simplify and standardize water quality protection measures and monitoring on NFS lands in accordance with the Clean Water Act and state BMP objectives. A draft BMP Handbook has been developed and is currently undergoing internal review. An external review by other agencies, states, partners, and the public is anticipated in summer 2008. The Handbook includes direction and guidance to facilitate adaptive management that can improve the Agency's ability to protect water resources. Direction is provided through a standard national set of BMPs that apply to most projects on NFS lands. The term BMP as used in the Handbook is defined as methods or measures applied during planning or implementation of natural resource management activities as a means to meet nonpoint source water pollution control and soil conservation objectives. The BMPs are grouped into common Forest Service activity categories including vegetation harvest and regeneration, grazing, fire management, recreation, and road and trail management. For each BMP, the Handbook provides both planning and on-the-ground techniques for controlling nonpoint source pollution, particularly sedimentation. A set of BMP monitoring protocols are also being designed to (1) identify whether nonpoint source control activities stated in environmental documents, Forest Plans, and other applicable documents are being implemented fully; and (2) determine if these BMPs are effective at controlling intended pollutants. While some National Forests and Grasslands collaborate with their respective states to monitor BMPs, the majority does not. Moreover, those states that have BMP monitoring programs are generally limited to certain activities such as vegetation harvest or mining. The FS BMP monitoring program is intended to augment existing state programs, provide monitoring tools where they do not exist, and allow the Agency to expand implementation and effectiveness monitoring in a consistent manner across a wide range of management activities. Monitoring results will be used to report accomplishments and adapt management where necessary to adequately protect water resources.

KEYWORDS

Best management practices, BMPs, monitoring, National Forests and Grasslands, adaptive management