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AGENDA ITEM NO.: 10

**PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING DATE:** March 27, 2013

SUBJECT: Forest Plan Revision

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Inyo National Forest is working on updating the Inyo National Forest Plan. County Staff is working with Forest Service in developing the Plan, and will report on recent activities.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Supervisory District: County-wide

Recommended Action: No Action Necessary – Informational Only

Project Planner: Nolan Bobroff, Planning Coordinator

BACKGROUND

The Inyo National Forest (INF) is working on updating the Inyo National Forest Plan. In 2012, the US Forest Service (USFS) released a new planning rule and the INF was one of eight forests selected as an “early adopter” of the rule and is one of the first forests to revise their plan under the new rule. Inyo County participated extensively in development of this rule and the new rule requires that the USFS coordinate with local governments in developing the plan. The Forest Service has created a website with relevant Plan Revision information at www.fs.usda.gov/main/inyo/landmanagement/planning. The planning website, www.inyoplanning.org also has a wealth of information related to plan revision on the “Current Projects” page.

Forest Plans act as the General Plan for the forest and provide guidance for management of the National Forest. They typically have a 10-15 year life span, although the previous plan was approved in 1988.

Plan Revision is broken down into 3 phases including: (1) Assessment; (2) Plan Revision; and (3) Monitoring. Currently, the process is in the assessment phase. The Final Assessment Report is expected to be released in December, 2013 and Plan Revision is expected to be completed in 2016. The local Forest Service office has assembled a team of experts to revise the plan and a core team in the regional office has been assembled, comprised of an economist, ecologist, social scientist, and a technical editor. They have also teamed up with the Center for Collaborative Policy (CCP) to assist in public outreach. Through the CCP, the Forest Service has held numerous meetings with the public and other agencies to gather information and direction for what should be included in the plan revision.

Collaboration and Communication Plan (C&C Plan)

In early 2013, the final C&C Plan was released. This plan outlines how the INF will work with its partners, stakeholders, interested public members, and Tribes during the Plan Revision process. It is intended to define the public outreach, involvement and collaborative processes that will be used to develop a Forest Plan and identify activities and communications tools to provide information and solicit input on forest planning from the above named groups. Public Outreach has been divided into two tiers. The first tier focuses on public outreach during all phases of the effort, and includes maintaining a website; email announcements; media relations; outreach materials; tribal, federal, state, county, and municipal government notifications/briefings; and permittee notification. The second tier is for more focused outreach activities, such as brochures, social media, regional status updates, and video briefings; forums with scientists, agency partners, local government, and tribes; youth summits; Hispanic community workshops; open houses; visitor comment forms; collaborative issue forums; town halls; and volunteers. Staff believes this plan is adequate, but fails to include specific references to coordination.

Sierra Cascades Dialog

The Forest Service has conducted a series of Dialogs with the assistance of the CCP over the last several years to discuss a range of issues affecting national forests in the Sierra Nevada and the Cascades and people who live, work, and recreate there. The Dialogs have focused on the future of the national forests, providing opportunities for learning, shared meaning, aligned actions, and understanding different perspectives.

Science Synthesis

The 2012 Planning Rule requires the forests to consider the best available science and encourages a more active role for research in plan development. To accomplish this, the Pacific Southwest Research Station (PSW) worked on a Science Synthesis to provide background data regarding Sierra-wide issues. This report mainly focused on the western side of the Sierra's and largely ignored the eastern side. This report was released in January, 2013 and discussed at the January Sierra Cascades Dialog. There has been discussion amongst local Forest Staff to hold a Science Symposium which focuses solely on the eastern sierras.

Bioregional Assessment

Forest Staff has begun working on the Bioregional Assessment, a report synthesizing existing information related to social, economic, and ecological conditions and trends related to all ten of the National Forests in the Sierra Nevada mountain range. It is intended to be conducted rapidly, using readily available information and existing data, identify knowledge or information gaps, and provide a source of information and context for plan revision. It is comprised of the 15 assessment topics identified in the 2012 Planning Rule. Each topic is broken down into processes and methods, current conditions, trends, and various other categories relevant to each topic. The report is a “living assessment” and is available on a Wiki-Style website that allows the public to provide input on the various topics. Forest Staff is continually updating the Assessment with information provided on the wiki site and intend to release the draft Assessment Report in the winter of 2013. The “living assessment” can be found at www.livingassessment.wikispaces.com.

Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the INF and Inyo County

Staff has been working with Forest Staff to develop an MOA outlining coordination direction and efforts between the two groups. The agreement designates the County as a Cooperating Agency with special expertise in certain areas relevant to the County and allows the County to provide recommendations regarding the scope, scale, timing, methods, and forums for public involvement. It encompasses the concepts of a Regional MOA between the BLM, USFS, California State Association of Counties, and Regional Council of Rural Counties and expands on certain areas that are more relevant and important to Inyo County. The MOA maintains the County’s rights to participate in plan development outside of the MOA, including the right to object to the Plan Decision.

Assessment Phase Kick-Off Meeting

The Forest Service recently held Kick-Off meetings for the Assessment Phase of Plan. Meetings were held in Bishop and Mammoth Lakes. The Bishop meeting had approximately 35 people in attendance representing a wide range of agencies, groups and the public. Forest Staff gave a brief presentation on Plan Revision and organized discussion groups based on the assessment topics. Information gleaned from this meeting will help the Forest Staff refine the assessment topic papers.