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AGENDA ITEM NO.: 7

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING DATE: July 24, 2013

SUBJECT: Inyo National Forest Plan Update/Revision – Draft Topic Papers and Focus Papers

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The County is working with the Inyo National Forest (INF) on its update to the INF Plan. Topic papers were released regarding the Plan Update/Revision earlier this year, and the Planning Commission previously provided input for the Board of Supervisors' consideration. The comment period for the Topic Papers has been extended, and additional input regarding the Topic Papers from the Planning Commission is being requested for the Board's consideration, as well as regarding draft Focus Papers that are being prepared by County staff.

PROJECT INFORMATION

Supervisory District: County-wide

Recommended Action: **Provide input and recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding the Draft Topic Papers and the Draft Focus Papers**

Project Planner: Joshua Hart, AICP, Planning Director

BACKGROUND

The INF is working on updating its Forest Plan. Draft Topic Papers for the Update/Revision were released on May 8 for public review, and the Planning Commission provided input at its May 22, 2013 meeting; the comment period was subsequently extended to September 1. Staff is presenting the Topic Papers to the Planning Commission for a second time for its recommendations to the Board of Supervisors, which is anticipated to review the documents in August. The Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) reviewed the draft Topic Papers and provided input on June 6, 2013, and is scheduled to review the Papers again on August 8.

The Planning Commission reviewed the Topic Papers at its regular May 22 meeting and provided input. The following summarizes that previous input:

- Payment in-lieu taxes (PILT) does not adequately offset County costs to provide services and does not address the opportunity costs of federal land management. PILT payments are subject to the legislative process, and neither payment amount nor compensation in a timely manner are assured.
- The Forest Service should coordinate with the County.
- The State Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) is not disclosing when it kills fish. Destroying the fishery will destroy recreation. The amphibians are being killed by pollution from the west side of the mountains.
- The resort industry and the Fish and Game Commission need to be involved.
- There are too many meetings.
- People who have been fishing here for generations are not returning due to the State DFW's management. This is resulting in cultural-historic impacts.
- Mining and packing are being impacted.
- The County's public outreach effort should be strengthened.
- Closing roads impedes people with limited mobility and other impairments from visiting the Forest.

The NRAC reviewed the Topic Papers at its June 6 meeting. The following summarizes comments made by individual NRAC members:

- The Plan will result in socioeconomic impacts and further impede mining.
- The environmental impacts of mining should be considered.
- The County should collaborate with other jurisdictions.
- Total impacts should be considered. A regional approach may be beneficial. Our communities are equal at the table.
- Endangered species protections have been applied inconsistently.
- The 1988 Plan lacked baseline data, which is still lacking.
- The Natural Range of Variability (NRV) Assessments provide baseline vegetation data. Management will not lead to a natural state. We need to point out specific references that are invalid.
- We have information overload.
- We need more public outreach
- There is a strong relationship between the people and the Forest.
- We need to analyze mitigation, which is missing from the Topic Papers.
- Dust pollution from Owens Lake has improved over the last several decades.

This input was reported to the Board of Supervisors, and in particular, direction was requested regarding strengthening the County's public outreach effort. The Board directed staff to do so by conducting evening Board meetings in various communities during strategic phases of the Forest Plan Update/Revision, and publicizing these meetings to encourage public attendance to solicit input directly to the Board. The Board also directed staff to work on Focus Papers to identify the County's issues to assist the public in concentrating its input.

ANALYSIS

The Topic Papers¹ build on the work begun with the Science Synthesis and Bioregional Assessment, and are intended to provide the basis for the Forest Plan Update/Revision Assessment (e.g., the first phase of Plan revision). The Papers comprise 15 chapters corresponding with the topics identified in the 2012 Planning Rule. The Commission may refer to previous information presented regarding the Topic Papers on the County's website.² Staff requests that the Planning Commission review the summary of the previous input and provide any updates.

As discussed above, the Board directed staff to develop Focus Papers to assist in public understanding issues germane to the County. Staff is working on the following four Focus Papers: (1) Socioeconomics, (2) Multiple Uses, (3) Biology, and (4) Infrastructure/Services. Draft work product for the Focus Papers will be distributed under separate cover. Staff is requesting that the Planning Commission provide input.

Next Steps

The Forest Service plans to incorporate input received regarding the Topic Papers into final documents for development of the Assessment by the Regional Team. The Draft Assessment is anticipated in early October, with a final Assessment later in the year, followed by an analysis of the need for change prior to development of the draft Plan and Environmental Impact Statement.

PREPARED AND APPROVED BY:


Joshua Hart, AICP
Director, Inyo County Planning Department

¹ Refer to <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/inyo/landmanagement/planning> to review the Topic Papers.

² Refer to <http://inyoplanning.org/InyoNationalForest.htm>.