

Interest Linkages

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT ISSUES AND TRENDS OVERVIEW FINDINGS

Manti-La Sal National Forest
Dixie and Fishlake National Forests
Profile of Public Comments Submitted
to USFS
General Utah Forest Linkages



SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT ISSUES AND TRENDS

- Interest Linkages describe the many and varied ways in which people link to National Forest lands through their joint ownership of those lands and through special concerns they have over how that land is managed.
- Major *issues of concern* to people interested in these three forests include: forest health; social and cultural values and attachments to these forests; access to National Forest System lands, recreation and its management, vegetation manipulation, watershed protection, managing wildland-urban interface issues, allowing for multiple uses of the land (including commodity production), managing conflicts between various user groups, and coordinating with local and tribal governments on land and resource management issues.
- A review of interest linkages reveals that there is little consensus among the American public about how National Forests, in general, and these three National Forests, in particular, should be managed. Special interests have differences of opinion concerning the philosophical basis for forest management, what they think should be contained in a forest plan, which priorities they would give to particular uses and to particular users, which areas should receive special designations that would put conditions on use, what analyses they think the USFS needs to conduct, and recommended management actions (in general and in specific sites). Furthermore, they are divided on whether they think the USFS is doing a good job fulfilling its obligations to manage the land on behalf of the American public.

- Some of the people who have concerns about National Forest planning and management are located in places distant from the forests. Thus, involving them in public meetings and other forums designed to solicit public input is difficult. Their concerns often come to the attention of the USFS through submission of written comments, litigation, and other means of direct action designed to further their interests.
- Some special interests do not bring their concerns directly to the attention of the USFS but instead are involved in furthering their interests through direct contact with other members of the public or with people who share their interests. One avenue for identifying special interests comes through looking at their means of communicating with each other, such as through the internet. Internet web sites contain useful and often detailed information articulating the concerns and views of groups with special interests in NFS management.
- Finding complete information on interest linkages is difficult because the sources of information are diffuse, sometimes difficult to access, and very large in number. Thus, there is a need to tie detailed analyses to specific issues or management problems or prescriptions so the research questions and data gathering can be focused, efficient, and useful for decision making.

OVERVIEW

Many people care about and are interested in what happens with our national forests. Interest linkages to USFS land capture the connections that people who care about the forests have to them. Interest linkages come through being a part owner of the land (through being a U.S. citizen) or an interested foreign national and, thus, having a say or identified interest in how it should be managed. This does not mean that people who are in these linkages are not also involved in various types of use linkages but, in those instances, we would categorize them as being in a use linkage in addition to being in an interest linkage.

The Interest Linkages category recognizes that while many people *use* national forests, people are also very interested in what happens in national forests for a wide variety of reasons aside from their own use, and have a right to have a say in forest planning. Thus, “interest linkages” are distinct but often overlap with “use linkages.” Special interest linkages are often expressed through public involvement efforts or political activities focused on forest management.

Several basic types of interest linkages are relevant to most national forests: general public linkages; special interest or “motivated interest” linkages; cultural, heritage and historic interest linkages; contributor linkages; science linkages; and economic linkages. (A more detailed description of Interest Linkages can be found in “Types of Linkages” below and in the full presentation of the Linkages to Public Land Framework found in *Appendix A2*). Section 2B is devoted to a discussion of economic linkages. Since the USFS has personnel involved in documenting and managing cultural and historic interests, contributor agreements, and science contracts, we do not focus on those subcategories of interest linkages in this assessment.

In this section, we focus on identifying special interest or “motivated interest” linkages. Hundreds of existing or potential advocacy groups seek to influence USFS decisions. They include wilderness advocates, biodiversity advocates, wise use advocates, sportsmen and recreationists, hunters and fishers, rock climbers, off-highway vehicle advocates, people concerned about “sense of place” and cultural/spiritual ties, people attracted to specific natural features, and residents adjacent to the national forests. These interests are the focus of this section.

FINDINGS

We reviewed several data sources in order to profile the special or motivated interests related to forest plan revision on the Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests and to profile some of the basic concerns of people in these linkages. First, we reviewed public input information that each forest collected as part of Forest Plan Revision, such as Forest Plan revision mailing lists, public comment files, correspondence files, and public involvement meeting notes. Second, in addition to using USFS sources of information to identify special or “motivated” interests, we conducted Google internet searches for all three Forests in order to take a basic inventory of the groups that the search engine identified with these forests.

This data gathering is not comprehensive and was intended to be a starting point for further study. This is a descriptive exercise, not a systematic data collection effort, which

would require specific issues, problems, etc. to be addressed on a more site-specific basis. This review utilizes data upon which the Forest Service has traditionally relied and data conveniently available through the Internet. Our profiles of special interests are meant to be illustrative rather than exhaustive of the types of organizations which have expressed interests in these three Forests. The categories are not mutually exclusive either.

People and groups with special interests in the Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests have different opinions about what they want the USFS to do in managing these forests and how they want the agency to revise forest plans. These differences of opinion come to a head in several key, inter-related issues that are driving public debate over the future of these forests. The relative level of importance of these issues will differ by forest.

The key underlying issue over which various interests disagree has to do with the *future vision* for these forests. Some people see these forests as working landscapes and believe that people can continue to use and enjoy them without fundamentally impairing them for the future. These people support a forest plan based upon a multiple-use, sustained-yield approach. Other people view these forests as preserves for maintaining natural ecosystem functions and biological diversity, and support a more conservation and ecology-based forest management plan that limits human access to and use of forest resources.

A second key issue over which various interests disagree is *forest health*. Much debate is centered on the assessment of whether or not the three National Forests in southern Utah are in a healthy state, what factors caused or led to their current states, and what future management actions are necessary. Many observers agree that these forest systems are not in a healthy state at the present time, but they adamantly disagree on what needs to be done to rectify the situation. Some observers think the current unhealthy state is due to legal obstacles to more effective human management of the forests and they advocate more active interventionist management strategies in the future. Other people think that the present unhealthy condition is due precisely to past management interventions (e.g., timber harvest, fire management, and predator control programs) and they advocate a “hands-off” approach to future management, arguing for letting nature take its course without human interference. These different interests generally support diametrically opposed management recommendations in specific situations.

A third key issue that divides various interests concerns the *social and cultural values* of these forests. Some interests see people as a part of the forests and see the forests as an integral part of the way of life in local communities. Use and attachments to these forests are seen as important for maintaining this set of social and cultural values and the way of life that is based upon them. Other interests see these forests as serving a different set of social and cultural values that has more to do with obligations that people have to preserve other species and to minimize human impacts in areas reserved as public lands. Depending on the particular social and cultural values that different groups attach to these forests, their recommendations for management vary and often conflict.

A fourth set of issues deals with the specific human uses that should be allowed to occur on these forests. The most controversial issue appears to be over *motorized recreation and OHV use* on the forests, since this involves the biggest change in recreational use of these forests since the first round of planning. Various interests are bracing for battle on this issue by gathering evidence and soliciting political support for either the motorized or non-motorized viewpoints. Another controversial human use issue is *grazing* and whether this use should

continue. The various interests are debating the ecological effects of grazing, the effects of promoting grazing on native wildlife, and the appropriateness of public subsidies for grazing on public lands. A third controversial issue is *predator control* and how much humans should be allowed to interfere with native wildlife populations in order to pursue human economic and recreational uses.

The USFS faces a very difficult situation in its attempts to revise the forest plans. The fundamental questions for the agency are whether it can find a balance to satisfy the various interests of its diverse constituent base (the American public), when and where it will need to make difficult decisions about resource distribution, and how it will devise plans that comply with the many federal laws that provide legal and policy guidance for its actions. Forest management is governed by a large set of laws that have accumulated over time and which are assumed to be congruent with one another. Forest planning is the process by which the agency is supposed to coordinate all of its legal and policy obligations and make them work in the context of a particular National Forest. Whether the USFS can meet all of these obligations on the Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests, and whether the land is capable of providing for all of the uses that have been authorized to occur, are the most critical issues from the point of view of the USFS.

Manti-La Sal National Forest

Here we provide a basic profile of the interest linkages for the Manti-La Sal National Forests based upon information contained in its mailing list, public comment file, and public meeting notes.

Mailing Lists

For the Manti-La Sal National Forest, the mailing list included a total of 380 people as of June 2, 2003. Unless a person's name was affiliated with an organization, the mailing address alone did not reveal the nature of the special interest. Thus, we profiled the agencies and organizations (excluding unaffiliated individuals) for whom an interest could be inferred from the name, and came up with the following categories of special interests:

- Wilderness/Biodiversity/Conservation Advocacy/Environmental Organizations

- Anti-Wilderness Groups

- Ranching/Cattlemen's/Woolgrowers' Associations

- Oil/Gas/Coal/Mining Interest Groups and Associations

- Indian Tribes

- Federal Agencies

- County Councils and Commissioners

- Utah State Agencies

- Members of Congress

- County Water Agencies and Soil Conservation Districts

- Associations of Governments

- County and City Governments

- Travel Councils and Tourism Groups

- Media Outlets

- Unaffiliated Individuals

- OHV Groups

Public Comment File

The public comment file for the Manti-La Sal National Forest contains excerpts from public comments that were gathered through written public comment form that asked respondents to identify the kinds of uses and concerns they may have regarding forest management, and to specify the geographic area to which these comments apply. These data were entered into a public comments file which identified geographic area, resource, topic of concern regarding forest management, and addresses for a total of 163 respondents who submitted comments. The actual comments that people submitted are briefly summarized in the database by the Forest Service, thus, the following profiling is not based upon the original forms via which these concerns were submitted.

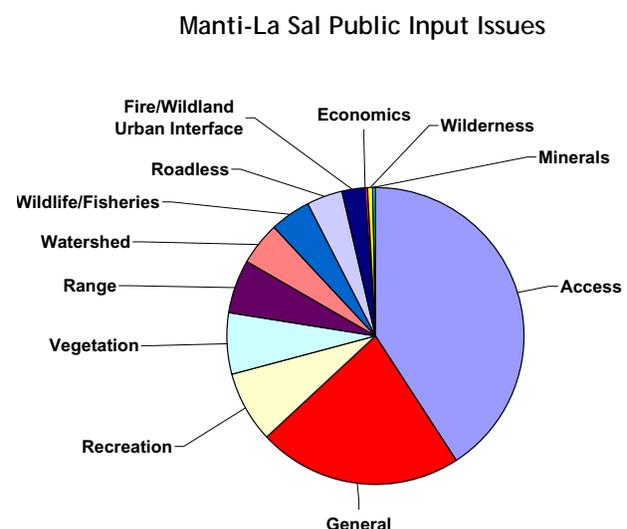
Profile of People Submitting Public Comments

For those respondents who gave an address, the largest concentration of comments came from Moab (59), Blanding (25), Monticello (17), and several other nearby small communities in Utah (42). Seven comments came from proximate communities in Colorado, six from northern Colorado (Fort Collins and Longmont), four from the Wasatch Front (Salt Lake City, Sandy) and one from Texas. One caveat with the public comments file is that each comment on a specific geographic area was considered separately, so that one individual from a given location might have submitted the same or multiple comments pertaining to different geographic areas. Organizations and agencies represented in the public comment file are mainly OHV groups, Soil Conservation Districts, County Commissioners, the Utah Environmental Council, and the Utah Water Project.

Profile of Concerns Contained in Public Comments - Issues

Personnel from the Manti-La Sal National Forest grouped the resources and the resource issues and concerns that were mentioned into several categories, but the category titles alone do not reflect the diversity of comments on particular issues and people have a hard time seeing themselves in such a categorization scheme. For example, "access" was the most frequently mentioned issue, but comments on "access" ranged from those who want more access, less access, limited access for particular groups, exclusive access, etc. or subtopics, like OHV use or roads. The frequencies with which various categories of concerns were mentioned in the comment file (as categorized by the Forest Service) are listed below, in descending order:

Access	274
General	150
Recreation	52
Vegetation	44
Range	40
Watershed	32
Wildlife/Fisheries	29
Roadless	27
Fire/Wildland	
Urban Interface	16
Economics	3
Wilderness	3
Minerals	2



The fact that “access” is the most frequent category of concern is interesting in light of our findings on Use Linkages, which show that access to the land is the basic right or privilege that people need in order to be able to engage in all other activities on National Forest System lands. This would help to explain the large percentage of comments concerning access. The other category with a large number of comments was labeled “General” by the Forest Service. This category contains a diversity of comments that are generally less site- and resource-specific, convey opinions about Forest Service management, raise questions, and speak to the politics of forest planning.

Our review of the public comments makes it clear that there is little public consensus about what the Forest Service should do about the topics that were identified. For most comments advocating a particular point of view, another comment advocating the opposite point of view can be found in the file. Furthermore, for many issues, the synthesis of recommendations would appear to put the USFS in a quandary in terms of being able to adequately respond to public comments in a manner that would satisfy everyone. Satisfying everyone is not something the USFS can always accomplish, but adequately addressing all of the comments and explaining why various decisions were made would provide fair treatment to the people who submitted public comments.

While the frequencies with which various concerns were mentioned can help the Forest Service to identify priority issues, we noted that the same comment (worded alike) was often submitted multiple times by multiple people or the same comment would be submitted in relation to every geographic area. The Forest Service frequently encounters this issue in relation to land management, where people sometimes assume that the public comment process is akin to “voting.” This approach to interpreting public comments gives more weight to people who are politically organized or personally involved in the planning process than it does to people who may be fewer in numbers but may have informed observations, practical experience, scientific expertise, or legitimate legal arguments behind their comments. Furthermore, the views of people who do not voice their opinions to the Forest Service directly are not necessarily represented in the public comment files.

Notes from Public Meetings

The Manti-La Sal National Forest conducted a series of meetings regarding Forest Plan Revisions with local ranger districts and with people from the counties surrounding the forests. Meetings were held on the Sanpete, Moab, and Ferron-Price Ranger Districts in November of 2002. The Forest Service met with the commissioners of Carbon, Emery, Grand, San Juan, and Sanpete Counties in February and March of 2003. Public meetings were held in Blanding, Castle Dale, Ferron, Gunnison, Huntington, Manti, Mt. Pleasant, Moab, and Monticello between February and May of 2003. The notes from these meetings do not mention the names of attendees and the points made are largely recorded in bullet-form, but our review of these documents nevertheless enables some profiling of the concerns of what appears to be mostly local residents.

In terms of use linkages, the underlying theme is that people want to see multiple uses continue on the Manti-La Sal National Forest, including grazing, timber harvesting, oil and gas development, mining, and recreation. Multiple uses of the forests are directly related to economic diversification strategies, which are of major concern of local communities

and counties. Some comments relate to ways in which locals want help from the Forest Service in promoting the area (e.g., trail designations, scenic byways, promotion, signage, interpretation) but also in managing the resulting increased use (e.g., protecting cultural resources, responding to risks from outsiders engaging in more dangerous sports). Other comments indicate that local people are concerned about conflicts between different uses and want these conflicts to be managed so all uses continue, because all of the uses contribute in some way to local economies. Examples are the possible effects of coal development on water sources, and the conflicts between grazing and recreation.

Water is a major issue of concern in relation to use of the forest. Comments refer to protecting culinary water sources, accessing irrigation structures on the forest, managing land for optimum water yield, addressing water quality issues and Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs), meeting hydropower needs, and upgrading aging water infrastructure (storage, treatment, and conveyance facilities).

Many issues of concern relate to neighboring land linkages and, more specifically, to private property, which local government officials have a duty to protect as well as regulate. These issues include access to inholdings, easements to cross private land to access the forest, and trespass and other impacts to private lands from various forest users. The spread of noxious weeds and spruce beetles from public to private land is a concern. Comments concerning aesthetic and cultural issues relate to the forest being the “backdrop” of local communities, local people’s “backyard,” and a significant contributor to quality of life in the area.

County Commissioners express concerns that relate to protecting private property, promoting economic development and community stability, and coordinating government functions. In terms of government functions, they are concerned about coordination with the Forest Service on roads and transportation planning, law enforcement issues, provision of fire and rescue services, and responding to the emergencies related largely to recreational use of forest land (e.g., avalanche danger from winter sports, bouldering).

Dixie and Fishlake National Forests

Public Comments on Forest Plan Revision

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests are engaged in a common Forest Plan Revision process and have conducted joint public involvement activities. They have received numerous comments from interested stakeholders about their Forest Plan revisions. A total of 288 comments were received on the Forest Plan revision as of 10/16/02. These comments were categorized by the Forest Service according to the following categories: date of the comment, name of the person giving the comment, address, geographic area of concern, how comments were gathered, and what the main interests and challenges the commenter identified with respect to the Dixie and Fishlake National Forests.

The public comments on forest plan revision came from residents of towns proximate to the Forests as well as from Salt Lake City, and many came from residents of other states. About half of the total (or 153/288) were collected on a form letter circulated at an ATV Jamboree in Richfield, Utah, representing people from Oregon, Wisconsin, Nevada, Arkansas, Minnesota, Nebraska, Arizona, Tennessee, and Canada, as well as from local towns in Utah.

The comments gathered through the form letter generally express concerns about continued access to the National Forests for hunting, fishing, camping, ATV use and horse riding. These comments suggest that Forest Service management should include continued access for these and other recreational purposes. A substantial number of comments on Forest Plan revision came from people whose livelihoods are partly or wholly dependent on timber and grazing. Many other comments came from people who have traditionally participated in recreational uses on these forests. Most comments from environmental/conservation-oriented organizations had to do with restoring and improving the condition of natural resources and wildlife habitats.

Many comments showed that individuals have overlapping, and sometimes quite complicated, linkages to the forests. For example, one commenter expressed concerns about the roads in the forests. He said he participated in hunting, fishing, and horseback riding and had a cabin on leased land. While he did not currently have grazing rights, he was interested in the range as his family previously worked in range management. The comments also illustrate the challenges the Dixie and Fishlake National Forests have in managing competing interests, as there are comments for and against nearly every use possible on the forests.

The Dixie and Fishlake National Forests also maintained an extensive mailing list of people who expressed interest in the Forest Plan revision process. This list contained 1760 individuals, many of whom represented organizations. The greatest concentration of locations on the mailing list were, in descending order: Las Vegas, NV (119); Richfield, UT (104); Cedar City, UT (91); Salt Lake City, UT (85); St. George, UT (59); Beaver, UT (52); plus several additional nearby rural towns in Utah such as Panguitch, Fillmore, and Circleville. Addresses from thirty states plus Canada were on the mailing list. The greatest number of addresses besides the 1230 addresses in Utah were from the states of California, Nevada, and Colorado, clearly sending states for recreation in the National Forests in Utah.

For those commenters using addresses representing an organization, the types of organizations mirror those that we identified as special interests above. The “special interests” represented on the Dixie and Fishlake mailing list are: American Indian tribes, grazing/cattle ranching; forests products/timber/logging industry; conservation/environmental/wilderness groups; State of Utah Department of Water Resources; county tourism offices; power companies; mining services industry; motorcycle industry; Utah Farm Bureau; snowmobilers; ATV users; horseback riding groups; and mountaineering/hiking clubs.

Public Involvement Meeting Notes

Public Involvement Workshop notes for the Dixie and Fishlake Forests contain information on the range of issues that are of concern to those who attended the meetings. The meetings took place over a period of several months and consisted of both forest-level workshops and local-level workshops. Workshop facilitators had participants rate the resource issues that they felt either needed change or increased emphasis and attention from the Forest Service by marking those issues with dots. The major resource issues, and the goals and objectives related to these resource issues that were raised at both forest-level and local-level workshops, were quite similar.

Forest-level workshops were held for stakeholders in regional centers such as Cedar City,

Las Vegas, Salt Lake City and Richfield. The top five resource issues identified in all of the forest-level workshops were, in descending order, *recreation; range (grazing); wildlife and fish; timber; fire protection*. Which particular issue was the highest priority issue varied somewhat between forest-level workshops, but with a few exceptions, the issues overlapped these top five priority resource issues. Recreation-related goals focused on the spectrum of recreation-opportunities including motorized and non-motorized uses. Participants expressed interest in better interagency coordination over noxious weeds and allotment management to reduce conflicts between wildlife and livestock. The priorities related to wildlife and fish were related to maintenance and enhancement of habitat. The timber-related goals focused on forest-health, including treatment to address fire and beetle infestation risks, as well as better utilization of forest products. Fire protection goals were centered on increasing the emphasis and implementation of goals related to fire protection/fuels management.

Local-level workshops were held in several communities located close to the forests, including Fillmore, Beaver, Junction, Richfield, Escalante, Panguitch, Cedar City, St. George and Kanab.

The local-level meetings focused on getting input/feedback on uses, conditions and opportunities within each of the geographic area units within the Dixie and Fishlake Forests. Participants were asked which activities they pursued within a given geographic area, in what location they pursued those activities, and why they chose that particular location. The comments gathered from participants mirrored the categories identified in the forest-level workshops. The activities that participants said they pursue on the forests are: 1) viewing scenery/wildlife viewing/photography; 2) recreation (ATV riding, mountain bike riding, cross country skiing, camping, fishing, hunting, tour guides for ATV rides; 3) livelihood (timber harvesting, irrigation for farming, sawmill, hydropower, grazing); 4) viewing cultural and historic sites (Native Americans and early settlers); and, 5) water supply for nearby communities (watersheds are in forest).

Profile of Public Comments Submitted to USFS

The public comments submitted to the Forest Service are interesting because they reveal the huge range of interests people have in the National Forests and because they are quite diverse in terms of what people note, observe, recommend, and advocate. Because these comments express these interests in significantly different ways, it creates challenges for the USFS and its ability to adequately and effectively address people's interests and concerns.

Below we have profiled the contents of these comments in a way that makes some connections to the linkages framework and provides some insights into whether and how these different types of comments might be addressed in the planning process.

Philosophical Comments

Quite a few of the comments contain philosophical statements about forest management. These comments often relate to the long-term goals of forest management and the means for achieving these goals. Statements about the philosophy of forest management include comments about the importance of managing for multiple uses and sustained yield, of protecting watershed functions and values, of keeping forests open for future generations to use and enjoy, of dealing with certain human and ecological risks (fire, invasive species), and of maintaining ecological processes and ecosystem health.

Some examples of philosophical comments are: 1) “Make it so when we are in the National Forest we don’t have to feel guilty . . . allow the public to enjoy the beauty and value of the forest;” 2) “The Forest Service duty to protect forest health is not limited to a narrow obligation to vegetation management, fire, and fuels treatment, but also conservation of the full range of fish, wildlife, ecological processes that are integral components of the forest ecosystem;” and, 3) “The Forest shouldn’t just be turned into a recreation playground . . . it has higher and better uses.”

Since such philosophical goals are generally hard to operationalize, it is not surprising that the means for achieving these goals are also the focus of philosophical comments, such as whether predators should be controlled or reintroduced, whether to rely on prescribed fire, or whether to use chaining or other mechanical means in vegetation management. Philosophical statements are hard for the Forest Service to respond to because they are rarely grounded geographically and can be politically contentious. However, these comments challenge both the Forest Service and the public to think deeply about a future vision for the national forests, about management goals for these particular forests and how to achieve them, and about debating and articulating this thinking in the planning process.

Comments on the Forest Plan

Many comments contain specific recommendations on the *process* for revising the forest plan and on what should be included in the plan. Some comments address the need for the forest plan to be coordinated with the planning efforts of other land and resource agencies (e.g., the BLM land management plans, interagency and interstate endangered species conservation plans and agreements, Utah water quality efforts), with local counties’ and communities’ planning efforts, and with other Forest Service planning activities (e.g., travel plans). The need for good public involvement and input are commented upon frequently. Many comments deal with elements people want to see in the plan, such as enforceable standards for each resource, detailed monitoring plans for various species and forest conditions, and various types of alternatives. Some comments speak to the format and usability of the plan, addressing issues like the nature of the revision and the flexibility of the plan to be used for adaptation over time.

Priority for Particular Uses and Users

Many of the people submitting comments advocate management priority for particular *uses* on the forest, with some of those comments being specific about which uses people think should or should not be allowed in certain areas. These comments pertain to many different human uses, such as grazing, wilderness, motorized recreation, non-motorized recreation, or timber harvesting, as well as to different non-human uses such as maintaining predators and endangered species. A perceived trade-off between “economic” and “ecological” uses is also contained in some of these comments, as illustrated in this statement: “Forest management should benefit the forest, not timber companies or energy companies.”

Uses for National Forest System lands must be authorized in federal legislation, but the relative priorities given to different uses within a particular forest or geographic area is at the heart of the forest planning process. Some comments recognize there have been impacts to the land from increasing use, assign blame for those impacts, and raise questions about the

sustainability of various uses. Comments about particular uses are often quite passionate and sometimes critical, indicating that allocating land to certain uses is indeed a very controversial part of forest planning.

Some people advocate a management priority for particular *users*, criticize certain users, or argue for ending what is perceived to be unfair priorities of some users. Sometimes this priority is stated in very individualistic terms. Comments pertaining to whether the Forest Service should pay greater attention to the needs of local communities compared to the needs of people from outside the state would be included in this category. Comments suggesting that the Forest Service favors big businesses over small producers, particularly in timber, coal, and gas operations, are other examples. This category would also include people's perceptions that some users receive unfair subsidization, profiting privately from public resources.

Area Designations

Related to prioritizing certain uses are more specific comments recommending that certain geographic areas be legally or officially designated for certain uses. These comments include recommended designations for the Wilderness System, the Wild and Scenic Rivers System, Research Natural Areas, and Cultural Emphasis Areas.

Recommended Analyses

Quite a few comments recommend that certain analyses be done as part of the forest plan revision process or as part of on-going management activities. Recommended analyses included basic inventories, analysis of impacts from various activities, ecological risk analyses, and monitoring studies. Some examples of specific analyses recommended are: conduct fish distribution studies; inventory rivers and streams; analyze the carrying capacity for ATVs/OHVs in different areas; assess threats to aquatic ecosystems; compare biophysical conditions today with those in 1986; and, analyze the impacts caused by motorized recreation to wildlife, vegetation, water quality and soils. These comments indicate that people want more information or want to be assured that management decisions are based upon good data. The Forest Service can address these types of comments by being forthright about available data, what can and cannot be done, and how this input is used in decision making.

Recommended Management Actions

Some entries contained in the public comment file recommend that certain management actions be taken by the Forest Service. Sometimes these are general recommendations, such as those related to increasing enforcement capabilities, engaging user groups in policing their own ranks, using certain design criteria (e.g. designing multiple users trails or travel loops instead of "in-and-out" routes), and involving local communities in decision-making. Some of these comments make suggestions about what the Forest Service should and should not do to address various issues, like considering a permit system to limit certain types of uses or not charging user fees. Some of these recommendations may or may not be the types of management actions that would best be included in the forest plans, thus, the Forest Service could work to clarify other ways in which these suggestions may be addressed if it is outside the forest planning process.

Site-Improvement Recommendations

Some comments contain very specific recommendations for making particular improvements, often related to roads or infrastructure. Some examples of these types of comments from the Manti-La Sal National Forest files are: “expand Arapeen trail system with maintenance, education, law enforcement, monitoring, signing, and Good Will Riders” “more fishing should be developed on the Abajo and Elk Ridge;” “keep the Fork/Pole Canyon single track motorized track open;” “protect old mill sites and the Upper Joe’s Guard Station;” “Ferron Reservoir campground needs to be overhauled;” and “do not improve the La Sal Loop Road because the resulting higher speeds of travel and probable increase in visitation would increase impacts to wildlife.” These comments suggest that some people are hoping the plan will prioritize certain projects. The relationship between the forest plan and the processes for prioritizing, authorizing, and funding specific projects should probably be clarified by the Forest Service in order to address these expectations.

Comments on the Forest Service

In some of the comments, people chose to comment on the Forest Service and the job it is doing. These comments are a mix of compliments and criticisms. Some people thanked the Forest Service for the opportunity to have input in the forest planning process and for the work that they are doing, generally pointing to something specific that they found to be favorable. In terms of criticisms, some people complained about biases on the part of local Forest Service employees and charged the Forest Service with being captured by certain special interests.

General Utah Forest Linkages

The special interests of groups that maintain internet sites which talk about the three forests are quite varied. They range from groups interested in connecting with people to engage in various activities together on the forests to groups advocating various political agendas and management scenarios for the forests. Since this information is found on the Internet, it is generally intended for the widest possible distribution. Thus, this information is geared toward the public and like-minded individuals and is generally not aimed at the Forest Service in particular. Thus, this information is a useful supplement to the correspondence files and public involvement information that the Forest Service itself collects.

Based upon a basic review of the sites found in the Google internet searches of the Dixie, Fishlake, and Manti-La Sal National Forests, we provide the following profile of the groups with special interests in these three forests. These groups generally have broader and more generalized interests in National Forest System lands as well.

Wilderness and Preservation Advocates

These groups have an interest in preserving the forests, managing for biodiversity, habitat, watershed and aquatic protection. Other issues that concern them are restoration of natural fire regimes, airshed management, protection of roadless areas, wilderness protection and designation, inventory and designation of wild and scenic rivers, and preserving areas for ecological research. Some of these groups are advocates for exclusive access to the forests for certain groups, while others are focused primarily on protecting the land from extractive uses, “industrial tourism,” and unmanaged wildland recreation, especially motorized recreation.

These groups are engaged in a variety of activities designed to further their interests, including conducting their own research and data gathering (e.g., roadless area inventory), litigating actions of the USFS, and developing a Citizens Forest Management Plan Alternative to be submitted to the USFS for consideration in the forest plan revisions for the three southern Utah National Forests. They often work cooperatively with one another on various issues and campaigns.

Examples: Wilderness and Preservation Advocates

- Utah Environmental Congress [UEC]
<http://www.uec-utah.org/index.htm> (site visited on October 27, 2003)
- Red Rock Forests Coalition
<http://www.redrockforests.org/> (site visited on October 27, 2003)
- Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
<http://www.suwa.org/> (site visited on October 28, 2003)
- Save our Canyons
<http://www.saveourcanyons.com/> (site visited on October 27, 2003)
- Forest Guardians
<http://www.fguardians.org/> (site visited on October 28, 2003)

Tourism / Travel / Outfitters / Sporting Groups / Photographers

These stakeholders have an economic interest that is attached to forest access or, at the least, related to proximity to the forests for their amenity values. The Manti-La Sal, Fishlake and Dixie National Forests are often advertised as national destination points and as a quality of life attribute for residents and tourists. The websites of these groups generally contain or have links to maps, pictures, and other tourist related information. These groups promote tourism and travel to these National Forests hoping that will bring associated economic benefits to their local communities and counties or to the state of Utah.

Examples: State, Local County and Community Travel and Tourism Bureaus

- Utah Travel Council at: <http://www.utah.com/>
- Utah Travel Center at: <http://www.utahtravelcenter.com/maps/forests.htm>
- Utah Adventure Travel at: <http://www.utah.com/nationalsites/>
- San Juan County Community Development at: <http://www.southeastutah.com/>
- Marysvale, Utah at: <http://www.marysvale.org/>

Examples: Outdoor Outfitters and Guides/Gear

- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) at: <http://www.rmefutah.org/>
- Wildernet at: http://www.wildernet.com/pages/area.cfm?areaID=UTNFP&cu_id=1
- Outfitters also may be found at regionally generated sites like:
 - Castle Country at: <http://www.castlecountry.com/>
 - Explore Utah at: <http://www.exploreutah.com/explore/natforest.shtml>

Examples: Non-Motorized Recreation Trail Advocates

- Fishing Lodges Network at: <http://www.fishinglodges.com>
(Advertised as the largest searchable database of fishing lodges on the Internet, it has links that may be searched for specific areas, including these forests)

- Bear Paw Lakeview Fishing Resort at: <http://www.bearpawfishingresort.com>
- Deer Trail Lodge at: <http://go-utah.com/Deer-Trail-Lodge>
- American Discovery Trail at: <http://www.discoverytrail.org/states/utah/>
- Arrowhead Trail at: <http://www.arrowheadtrails.com/>

Real Estate Agencies

These groups have an economic stake in preserving the amenity values in communities near the forest to attract buyers. They are generally involved in handling private land sales in nearby communities and in locations within, adjacent to, or in the vicinity of the national forests. The National Forests are viewed as an amenity and influence the price of real estate.

Example: <http://www.utahmountains.com/dixie-national-forest.html>

OHV Advocates

These groups want access to the forests for OHV use. Some of them want greater access while others want more regulated access so that trails do not become overcrowded and impacts to forest lands are minimized.

Examples:

- National Off-Highway Vehicle Conservation Council at: <http://www.hohvcc.org/>
- Blue Ribbon Coalition at: <http://www.sharetrails.org/>
- ATV Source/ San Juan Safari at: <http://www.sanjuansafari.com/>
- ATV news at: http://www.atvsource.com/articles/press_releases/2003/062603_san_juan_safari.htm
- South Eastern Utah O.H.V. Club/ Arapeen ATV Jamboree at: <http://www.arapeenatvjam.org/>

Scientific

These groups have a long-term interest in research on the forests. Their main goal is to understand the forest ecosystems of which these forests are a part.

Examples:

- Center for Biological Diversity at: <http://www.sw-center.org/swcbd>
- Colorado Plateau Land Use History-North America at: <http://www.cpluna.nau.edu>
- Colorado Plateau Field Institute at: <http://www.cffieldinstitute.org/index.php>
- Utah State University at: <http://www.usu.edu/>

Multiple-Use Advocate Groups

These groups want to use forests for extractive purposes and do not want restrictions or limitations due to environmental legislation or due to pressure from environmental groups.

Examples:

- Taxpayers for Common Sense at: <http://www.taxpayer.net/forest/>
- Center for Free Market Environmentalism at: <http://www.perc.org/>
- The Utah Shared Access Alliance or USA-ALL at: <http://usa-all.com/>

