

TESTIMONY  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES  
UNITED STATES SENATE

Concerning  
USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision)  
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Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision). Kathryn Maloney, Director of the Forest Service Strategic Planning and Resource Assessment Staff, accompanies me today.

The Forest Service has been engaged in strategic planning since the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) was passed in 1974. With enactment of the Government Performance and Results Act (the Results Act) in 1993, all federal agencies were required to prepare: (1) a long-term strategic plan that covers 5 or more years; (2) annual performance plans that specify the annual, near-term actions that are tied to the budget and taken to accomplish the plan's long-term goals and objectives; (3) annual reports of accomplishments; and (4) program monitoring and evaluation.

It is important to emphasize that while these two different laws require the Forest Service to conduct strategic planning, the agency uses a single strategic planning process that satisfies the requirements of both laws. One important part of RPA that is not a requirement of the Results Act, but which provides a scientific foundation for the Strategic Plan, is the RPA Assessment which provides information about resource situations on the nation's forests and rangelands. The Assessment provides much of the status and trend data for resources and identifies resource situations where focused action may be needed.

The Forest Service's current Strategic Plan was finalized in 1997 in accordance with the timetable established under the Results Act. The Results Act directs all federal agencies to update and revise their strategic plans at least every three years.

The Forest Service is nearing the final stages of revising its Strategic Plan. The development of the 2000 Revision started with consideration of science-based information from recent resource assessments, ideas and suggestions from the public, and other information. The draft 2000 Revision was released for public comment in November 1999.

The public comment period ended January 31, 2000. Staffs from this and other House and Senate committees were briefed on the 2000 Revision in December and again in February. We are considering the public's ideas and suggestions regarding the content

of the draft 2000 Revision in preparing the final document. The Forest Service will submit the final 2000 Revision to Congress by September.

Let me now talk about the substance of the 2000 Revision.

The Forest Service has significant authorities and responsibilities for stewardship of the nation's forest and grassland resources. The goals and objectives of the USDA Forest Service Strategic Plan (2000 Revision) will guide future agency actions in managing these resources. The 2000 Revision is intended to provide the context and purpose for near-term actions and the focus to provide long-term land health, public service, and other outcomes. The revised strategic plan is consistent with the shift of the Agency's management focus away from short-term measures of "inputs, outputs and process" such as miles of roads and the value of minerals produced to "outcomes" such as the health of the land, water quality, and customer satisfaction, as envisioned by the Results Act.

This focus on outcomes and long-term results represents an important change for the Forest Service in the way we view our management. While the national forests and grasslands will continue to provide products in the future, the Results Act and the public want us to focus on the outcomes of our management -- cleaner water, better habitat, healthier forests, and community stability and development.

The strategic plan proposes that these outcomes will be achieved by managing the lands and resources of the National Forest System, delivering technical assistance through State and Private Forestry and International Forestry programs, making use of scientific information from Research and Development programs, and improving the management and accountability of these activities. We also believe the 2000 Revision is an important step toward full integration of strategic planning and budgeting as required by the Results Act.

The four goals of the Forest Service's Strategic Plan 2000 Revision -- ecosystem health, multiple benefits for people, scientific and technical assistance, and effective public service -- will establish the overall direction for Agency programs for the next three to five years. The Forest Service will emphasize or de-emphasize programs based on management needs, benefits, and program outcomes.

Associated with each goal are objectives, strategies to achieve the objectives, and measures of progress. Collectively, these components of the strategic plan will provide purpose and context for future management actions and investments, as well as a set of milestones for evaluating progress toward the goals. By using goals and objectives, we intend to identify where changes in program direction need to take place, target budget resources more effectively, and improve program implementation at all levels of the organization.

For example, long-term program evaluation measures included in the strategic plan may find downward trends in water quality (suspended sediments, dissolved oxygen, water temperature). If these trends suggest that current programs are not producing the intended outcomes, they would highlight the need for different programs, adjustments to existing programs, or changes in budget requests. The outcomes of the program changes could then be tracked to verify improving trends or whether further modifications to the programs are necessary.

Annual performance plans will address specific management actions and investments needed to ensure progress toward the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. Annual performance measures are tied directly to project level operational activities. They will change more frequently than corporate strategic goals and objectives. Annual performance measures are indicators of the success or failure of project actions to achieve the outcomes identified by the strategic plan objectives.

The Forest Service budget will be based on performance measures for funding activities needed to achieve the goals and objectives of the strategic plan. Budget priorities are linked to the corporate strategic goals and are expressed through the relationship of budget authority and projected accomplishments. You saw the first reflection of this process in the performance-based budget structure of the FY 2001 budget request.

As required by the Results Act, program evaluations will be conducted in the future to analyze our progress in achieving our long-term outcomes, consistent with our strategic plan goals and objectives.

The USDA Forest Service is committed to providing the best possible stewardship to benefit current and future generations of Americans. The realities of diverse interests, finite budgets, and environmental considerations will influence the choices to be made in forest and rangeland management. The 2000 Revision addresses these realities, at least in a general way. To the extent new policies are adopted to reflect changes in these realities, the strategic plan will be reconciled, as appropriate, through annual performance plans.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, a corporation, a business, or an organization that cannot or will not adopt to change cannot survive. Organizations that embrace change and prepare for the future can survive, even flourish. Chief Michael Dombeck believes strategic planning is the hallmark of forward thinking organizations – one that helps an agency focus on the future and to learn from the past.

Although we have not reached the point where we have fully integrated the Results Act management model with Forest Service actions, we believe we have made a good start with the FY 2001 budget that starts to link the strategic plan and budget. This will be extended in FY 2002 with the 2000 Revision.

We appreciate the support the Committee has provided us in the endeavor to this point. We look forward to a continued dialogue with the committee as we implement the necessary changes in Forest Service budgeting, planning, and operation that will flow from the final 2000 Revision.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify. I look forward to any questions you may have.