

**DECISION NOTICE  
AND  
FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT**

**TIMBER SUITABILITY AMENDMENT**

U.S.D.A. Forest Service  
Rio Grande National Forest, Colorado

The Final Environmental Assessment (FEA) for the Timber Suitability Amendment documents the environmental consequences of an action alternative and a no action alternative. The FEA is on file at the Rio Grande National Forest Supervisors Office at Monte Vista, Colorado, and available upon request.

**The Decision:**

It is my decision to select Alternative 2 which amends the Revised Forest Plan and FEIS and provides for making the appropriate adjustments to the suitable timber lands for Alternative G, the selected alternative of the Forest Plan. This decision will keep the Forest Plan current with more up-to-date information.

**Public Involvement and Scoping:**

The Forest Service announced the analysis of suitable timber lands in quarterly scoping documents and invited comments. A local radio broadcast also discussed the proposed timber suitability amendment and invited comments. Two Draft EA's were issued in 1999 and sent to interested parties. The public responded and identified issues such as a wide range of alternatives, regeneration of forest stands, landscape linkages, biological evaluation, purpose and need, economics, data inconsistencies, lynx, water quality, archaeological concerns, cumulative effects, riparian areas and wetlands, and old growth. This decision considered those comments and issues received from interested individuals and organizations. The Forest Service response to these comments is documented in Appendix D of the FEA.

**The alternatives considered in detail were:**

Alternative 1: No Action: No changes would be made to the existing 1996 Forest Plan.  
Alternative 2: Make appropriate adjustments to suitable lands and related changes by amending the Forest Plan

**My decision is based upon the following:**

1. This alternative best fulfills the purpose and need by ensuring that Revised Forest Plan be kept current with best available data. It corrects the suitable lands base by removing acres that were inappropriately included in the Revised Forest Plan. It also adds in appropriate acreage that was fully intended to be included in the suitable lands base but was inadvertently omitted.

2. The amendment of suitable timber lands and related changes do not meet the criteria for significant amendment. Therefore the amendment would not affect goals, objectives and outputs projected by Alternative G in the Forest Plan.
3. There are no new environmental impacts from this amendment beyond those already disclosed in the FEIS for the Revised Forest Plan. The FEA tells me that there would be no direct impacts to resources from this amendment. Indirect and cumulative effects are also described and the increase in suitable lands would result in improved resource management over the National Forest. The Revised Forest Plan and FEIS appropriately disclose the effects of a timber program on various resources.
4. This FEA is responsive to public issues and concerns. The public raised some excellent issues that were incorporated into this analysis. Other issues are broad and were appropriately disclosed in the FEIS for the Revised Forest Plan, to which this FEA is tiered.
5. The Amendment has followed NFMA regulations and Regional Draft protocols in determining suitable timber lands. The Region 2 de-emphasis of FORPLAN usage is consistent with this Amendment.
6. Management flexibility would be improved by the amendment. Managers would be able to consider harvest opportunities over a larger land area, yet still be within management prescriptions that allow timber harvest as a viable multiple use. This does not mean more timber harvest would occur above that projected by Alternative G, the Forest Plan selected alternative.
7. The Amendment would eliminate a standard and all references relative to "suitable-scheduled" lands. This would be consistent with the de-emphasis of FORPLAN usage, and would eliminate an unnecessary restriction.
8. Finally, selecting Alternative 2 to make the necessary amendments, is the best way to keep the Revised Forest Plan alive as an up-to-date and useful document that directs the management of this National Forest.

### **Alternatives Considered But Not Selected**

Alternative 1 was not selected because it does not successfully update and adjust the suitable lands information in the Revised Forest Plan. This alternative would allow continuance of data inaccuracies that would not facilitate meeting Forest Plan goals, objectives and desired conditions set forth in the Revised Plan.

### **Conformance With Legal Requirements**

1. I have determined that this proposed action is consistent with the various requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) suitable timber lands determination. The Environmental Assessment and analysis is tiered to the Revised Forest Plan FEIS which appropriately addresses the suitable lands criteria on pages 3-160 through 3-165. The amendment would change the maps of suitable land areas, particularly in Figure 3-42 and the selected alternative Figure 3-47. New acreage figures for those lands would be adopted.

2. These acreage adjustments of Alternative 2 have adequately been analyzed and disclosed through this Environmental Assessment, meeting the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

3. The FEA complies with the Endangered Species Act requirements, Native American consultation, and other Federal laws and regulations. It meets the intent of CFR 219.12 which requires that the Forest Service keep up-to-date data bases for the purposes of planning and managing resources.

**I have determined through the FEA that this is not a major federal action that will significantly affect the quality of the human environment. Therefore an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. This "Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI)" determination is based upon the following:**

1. The FEA tells me there are no effects to public health or safety.
2. There are no effects to historic or cultural resources, park lands, prime farm lands, wetlands, wild and scenic rivers, or ecologically critical areas.
3. The effects of the amendment are not highly controversial.
4. The amendment does not involve unique or unknown risks.
5. The proposed action does not set a precedent.
6. The proposed action has few cumulative effects. The amendments to the Revised Forest Plan cause no direct impacts to the resources.
7. The proposed action does not affect sites listed or eligible for listing with the National Register of Historic Places nor causes destruction of scientific, cultural, or historical resources.
8. Threatened and Endangered Species and Sensitive species have been appropriately analyzed in the FEIS Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Animal Species, Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Plants Species, and Threatened, Endangered, Proposed, Candidate, Sensitive, Special Concern Plants and Significant Plant Communities. This includes a "...not likely to jeopardize..." determination relative to the lynx.
9. The proposed action is not inconsistent with Federal, State or local laws imposed for the protection of resources.

**I have determined through the FEA, Appendix A, that this Amendment is not significant and does not require analysis as a full scale Revision would require. This determination is based upon the following:**

1. Timing: It is better to address necessary changes to the Plan now since the expected life of the Plan would be 10 to 15 years.

2. Location and Size: The proposed amendment affects small acreages, about 8.3 of the suitable timber lands, and about 1 percent of the RGNF.

3. Goals, Objectives, and Outputs: The proposed amendment would have little effect on the Forest's ability to achieve goals, objectives and outputs.

4. Management Prescriptions: The addition of a desired condition statement to the Revised Forest Plan would not alter the intent of that prescription. No changes are proposed in prescription allocations.

**Implementation Date:**

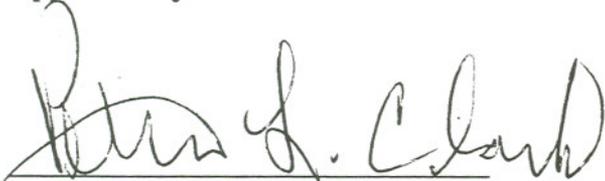
This decision shall be implementable as of the date of signature of this Decision Notice.

**This decision is subject to administrative review pursuant to 36 CFR Part 215.7. Any appeal of this decision must be fully consistent with 36 CFR 215.14, Content of an Appeal, including the reasons for the appeal, and must be filed with:**

Appeal Deciding Officer, Rocky Mountain Region, P.O. Box 25127, Lakewood, CO 80225-0127 within 45 days of the date specified in the published legal notice, which will be found in the Valley Courier newspaper, published daily in Alamosa, Colorado. For additional information concerning this decision or the Forest Service appeal process, contact Peter L. Clark, Forest Supervisor, Rio Grande National Forest, 1803 West Highway 160, Monte Vista, CO 81144, or telephone (719) 852-5941. Please also send a courtesy copy of the appeal to Peter L. Clark at the address above.

**Contact Person:** For more information, contact John J. Rawinski, Teamleader, Rio Grande National Forest, Monte Vista, CO 81144 (719 852 5941).

**Approved by:**



**PETER L. CLARK**  
Forest Supervisor  
Rio Grande National Forest

03/02/2000  
DATE