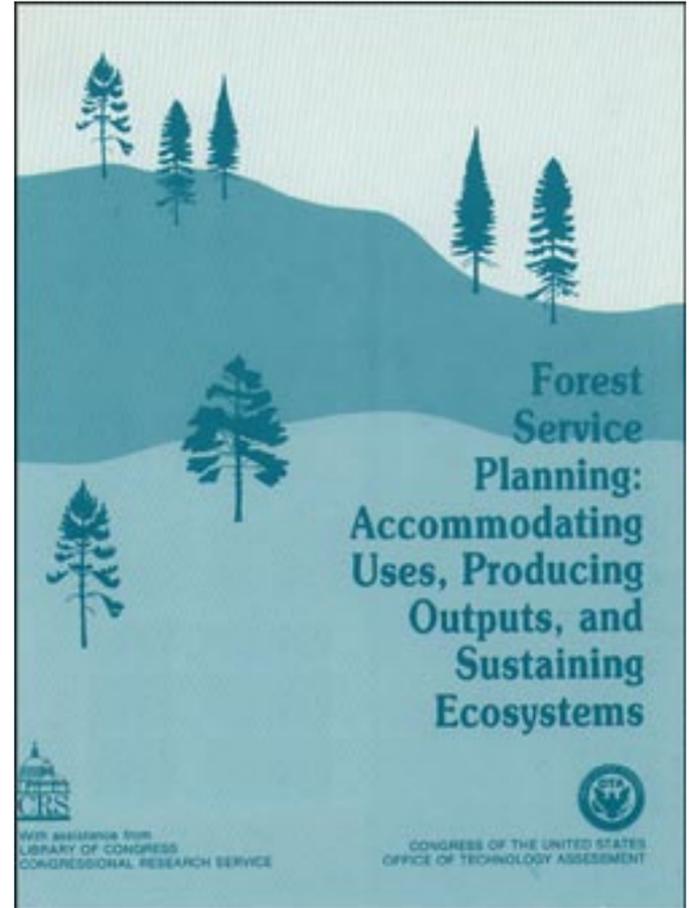


*Forest Service Planning: Accommodating
Uses, Producing Outputs, and Sustaining
Ecosystems*

February 1992

OTA-F-505

NTIS order #PB92-152560



Recommended Citation:

U.S. Congress, Office of Technology Assessment, *Forest Service Planning: Accommodating Uses, Producing Outputs, and Sustaining Ecosystems, OTA-F-505* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1992).

Foreword

America's forests and rangelands provide valuable commodities and amenities for U.S. citizens. Forests and rangelands account for two-thirds of all U.S. lands, and 40 percent of those lands are owned by the Federal Government. Forests and rangelands generate clean water, forage for livestock and wildlife, timber for construction, habitat for fish and wildlife, space for recreation, and pristine wilderness settings. The demands for these products and services rises as the country's population grows and leisure time increases. Thus, we are faced with increasing conflicts over the use of forests and rangelands, especially the Federal lands, and concerns about their long-run protection.

Congress enacted the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) in 1974, to assure long-term sustainable management of our Nation's renewable natural resources and to increase public involvement in associated policy and budget debates. In 1976, Congress amended RPA in the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) to guarantee sustainable management for the national forests managed by the USDA Forest Service and to assure active public involvement in the forest planning process.

Congress questioned the effectiveness of planning at the forest level under NFMA and expressed concern over the direction the process is headed. Most local forest plans have taken much longer to complete than anticipated, and frequently Congress has been asked to address controversial issues that it expected to be resolved in the planning process. Numerous administrative appeals and litigation of forest plans have come from environmentalists, business interests, and local governments.

In 1989, the House Committee on Agriculture, together with the House Interior and Insular Affairs Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands and the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, requested that the Office of Technology Assessment examine the Forest Service's use of resource planning technologies. In *Forest Service Planning: Setting Strategic Direction Under RPA*, released in July of 1990, OTA evaluated past RPA efforts and identified options for improving RPA's contribution to long-range planning and to policy and budget deliberations. This second OTA report on forest planning evaluates technological, biological, social, economic, and organizational dimensions of national forest planning. It discusses the agency's planning technologies, the appeals and litigation processes, and the relationship between national planning under RPA and forest-level planning under NFMA. The assessment presents options for Congress that could improve forest planning under NFMA.


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NOTE: OTA appreciates and is grateful for the valuable assistance and thoughtful critiques provided by the advisory panel members. The panel does **not**, however, necessarily approve, disapprove, or endorse this report. OTA assumes full responsibility for the report and the accuracy of its contents.

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NOTE: OTA wishes to express its appreciation to the Congressional Research Service for the assistance provided in this report. CRS graciously granted Ross Gorte a 14-month detail to direct this study, and to provide additional assistance before and after the completion of the assessment, to assure the purposes and tasks of the report were fulfilled. Thus, CRS's contributions to this study were substantial.

¹@ detail from the Congressional Research Service.

²From November 1989 to May 1991.