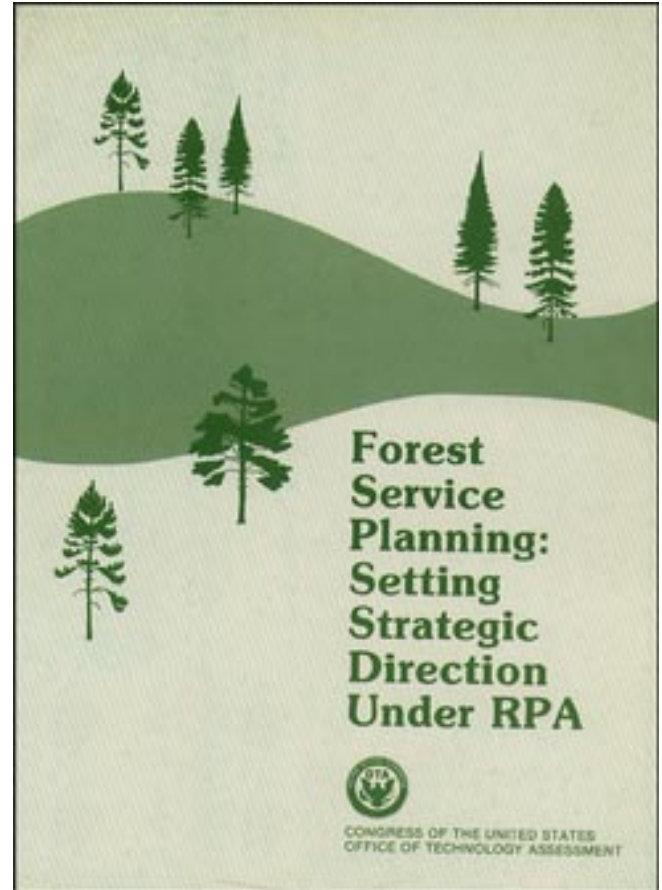


*Forest Service Planning: Setting Strategic
Direction Under RPA*

July 1990

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**Forest Service
Planning: Setting
Strategic Direction
Under the Forest and
Rangeland Renewable
Resources Planning
Act of 1974**



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Foreword

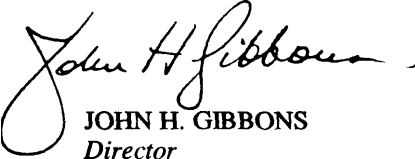
America's forests and rangelands provide valuable commodities and amenities for U.S. citizens. Forests and rangelands account for two-thirds of all U.S. land, and 40 percent of those lands are owned by the Federal Government. Forests and rangelands generate clean water, forage for livestock, timber for homes, habitat for fish and wildlife, area for recreation, and pristine wilderness settings. As our population has grown and leisure time has increased, the demands for these products and services has risen, leading to increased conflicts over the use of forests and rangelands, especially the Federal lands, and concerns about their long-run protection.

In 1974, Congress enacted the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act (RPA) to assure long-term sustainable management of our Nation's renewable natural resources and to increase public involvement in 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.

Various Members and Committees of Congress have expressed concern that RPA has not set strategic direction for Forest Service planning at the national level. The RPA Assessments have provided useful resource data and analysis, but have been incomplete, while the RPA Programs and Presidential Statements of Policy have not sufficiently addressed timely issues, guided budget deliberations, or assured sustainable resource management. In addition, the Annual Report of the Forest Service has not effectively documented progress in implementing the Program or accomplishing policy objectives.

Congress also has questioned the effectiveness of planning at the forest level under NFMA and has expressed concern over the direction in which the process is headed. Most of the local forest plans have taken much longer to complete than anticipated, and frequently Congress has been asked to address controversial issues which 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.

Because of these growing concerns, 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 the Office of Technology Assessment to examine the Forest Service's resource planning technologies and approaches. Because of the pending delivery of the 1990 RPA documents, the Committees asked that OTA examine the RPA planning process first. This report evaluates past RPA efforts, reviews the process used by the Forest Service in preparing the 1989 RPA Assessment and the Draft 1990 RPA Program, and identifies options for improving RPA's contribution to long-range planning and to policy and budget deliberations. The second OTA report on Forest Service planning will review national forest planning, and will examine the relationship between national planning under RPA and forest planning under NFMA.


JOHN H. GIBBONS
Director

Planning Technologies Advisory Panel

Hanna Cortner, *Chair*
Professor, Water Resources Research Center
University of Arizona

Clark Collins
Executive Director
Blue Ribbon Coalition
Pocatello, ID

Richard Collins
Professor/Director of the Institute
of Environmental Negotiations
School of Architecture
University of Virginia

Dennis Dykstra
Professor
School of Forestry
Northern Arizona University

Paul Ellefson
Professor
Department of Forest Resources
University of Minnesota

Jerry Franklin
Bloedel Professor of Ecosystem Analysis
College of Forestry
University of Washington

George T. Hamilton
Consultant
Recreation Resources Management Co.
Bow, NH

Willard Hamilton
Coordinator, Timber Resource Policy
Potlatch Corp.
Lewiston, ID

Betty Huskins
Vice President
Ridgetop Association
Linville Falls, NC

Andy Kerr
Director of Conservation and Education
Oregon Natural Resource Council

Dennis C. LeMaster
Professor and Head
Department of Forestry
and Natural Resources
Purdue University

William S. Platt
Fisheries Consultant
Don Chapman Association
Boise, ID

Robert Ragon
Executive Vice President
Sun Studs, Inc.
Roseburg, OR

Gerald Rose
Director/State Forester
Division of Forestry
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources

R. Neil Sampson
Executive Vice President
American Forestry Association
Washington, DC

Maitland S. Sharpe
Conservation Director
Izaak Walton League of America
Washington, DC

Maynard Smith
Rancher
Smith 6-S Livestock
Glen, MT

Gaylord L. Staveley
President
National Forest Recreation Association
Flagstaff, AZ

A. Milton Whiting
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Kaibab Industries, Inc.
Phoenix, AZ

Louisa Willcox
Policy Director
Greater Yellowstone Coalition
Bozeman, MT

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.

OTA Project Staff-Forest Service Planning: Setting Strategic Direction Under RPA

Roger C. Herdman, *Assistant Director, OTA
Health and Life Sciences Division*

Walter E. Parham, *Program Manager
Food and Renewable Resources Program*

Ross W. Gorte,¹*Project Director*

Analytical Staff

Robin P. White, *Analyst*

Daniel J. Whittle, *Research Analyst*

Susan Wintsch, *Contracted Editor*

Administrative Staff

N. Ellis Lewis, *Administrative Assistant*

Nellie Hammond, *Administrative Secretary*

Carolyn M. Swarm, *P.C. Specialist*

¹On detail from the Congressional Research Service.

WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS

Technology of Forest and Range Lands Assessment

Contractors

Clark Binkley
Yale School of Forestry
and Environmental Studies
New Haven, Ct

Perry Hagenstein
Resource Issues, Inc.
Wayland, MA

Lloyd Irland
The Irland Group
Augusta, ME

V. Alaric Sample
The Conservation Foundation
Washington, DC

A. Jay Schultz
Meadows, Schultz & Associates
Albuquerque, NM

Margaret Shannon
College of Environmental Science
and Forestry
State University of New York
Syracuse, NY

Other Panelists

Adela Backiel
Congressional Research Service
Library of Congress
Washington, DC

Richard Behan
School of Forestry
Northern Arizona University
Flagstaff, AZ

Hanna Cortner
Water Resources Research Center
University of Arizona
Tucson, AZ

Barry Flamm
The Wilderness Society
Washington, DC

John Heissenbuttel
American Forest Institute
Washington, DC

Dale Jones
Retired
Albuquerque, NM

Dennis LeMaster
Department of Forestry
and Natural Resources
Purdue University
W. Lafayette, IN

William E. Shands
The Conservation Foundation
Washington, DC

Robert Stone
Retired
Madison, WI

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