

### *Transportation and Access*

Management of our forest transportation system attracts public interest. Almost all users of the national forests use forest roads. The revised Forest Plan will incorporate the National Roads policy.

The current extensive system of roads and trails allows access to nearly every part of the forest. In addition, and by the direction of the current Forest Plan, the National Forests in Mississippi are "generally open to ORV's" (off-road vehicles), now more often referred to as OHV's (off-highway vehicles). Exceptions are individually identified areas of potential resource damage or conflict with other uses. Motorized use can reduce the habitat quality for some wildlife species and cause damage to the soil resource on sensitive sites. The use of motorized vehicles can also conflict with users who are seeking more solitude or create safety concerns for non-motorized users such as hikers or horseback riders. Motorized vehicle use, particularly that of all-terrain vehicles (ATV's), has increased dramatically over the last ten years. Furthermore, the current plan's assumption that cross-country travel by OHV's would be "limited by heavy undergrowth" has proven inaccurate. As a result, instances of resource damage and user conflicts have become increasingly common.

Transportation and access facets to be addressed during plan revision include:

- Management area direction should address transportation management and access needs. The forest's road system will be managed to meet resource needs and provide adequate public access.
- Determine level of local roads required to provide permanent, effective access to national forest lands for all resource management needs.
- Address off-road vehicles (ORV's) management to provide the appropriate level of recreational opportunities while protecting other resources.

### *Recreation*

National Forests in Mississippi offer a host of outdoor recreation opportunities. Recreation demand, both dispersed and developed, is expected to continue to increase over the next plan cycle. Increases in recreation use often create resource management conflicts. Different user groups compete for use of the same area, each having different expectations.

Planning will address five key areas: (1) Improving the settings for outdoor recreation and enhancing visitor experiences, (2) guaranteeing visitor satisfaction with our services and

facilities, (3) reaching out to rural and urban communities to capitalize on the social and economic opportunities associated with recreation on national forests, (4) strengthening our relationships with those who cooperate with us to improve outdoor recreation for all Americans, and (5) ensuring that recreation use does not impair the land's health.

### *Prescribed Fire*

Prescribed fire is an important management tool on the National Forests in Mississippi. The forest consistently ranks first or second in the nation in the amount of acreage to which it is applied. Historically, fire played a significant role in shaping the native plant and animal communities in Mississippi. Prior to European settlement, fires occurred throughout the year on a variety of sites, whenever conditions allowed natural or aboriginal ignitions to spread. Studies indicate that fire can have an influence on the successful regeneration of oaks. One of the concepts underlying ecosystem management is that natural processes should be simulated to the greatest extent possible. This builds on the idea that the structure and function of native ecosystems is best maintained by the conditions under which they evolved. Prescribed fire facets to be addressed during plan revision include:

- Determine role of prescribed fire in achieving forest ecosystem management goals and objectives.
- Identify and evaluate the extent, time of year (including summer growing season), and frequencies for prescribed fire use as an ecosystem management tool.
- Evaluate impacts associated with use of plow lines and establish appropriate standards and guidelines.
- Consider use of permanent fire lines, especially within wildland/urban interface zones.

### *Roadless Areas*

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for Roadless Area Review and Evaluation II (RARE II) of 1979 inventoried three roadless areas on national forest lands in Mississippi. Two areas, Black Creek and Leaf, were recommended for wilderness designation. The third, Sandy Creek, was listed for further study. The Mississippi National Forest Wilderness Act of 1984 (Pub. L. 98-515, Oct. 19, 1984, 98 Stat. 2420) established the Black Creek Wilderness and the Leaf Wilderness. Included in the act was "release" language which directed that inventoried areas not designed as wilderness be managed for multiple use;

however, the act also directed that the "wilderness option" be reviewed for such areas when the Forest Plan was revised. For the National Forests in Mississippi, the Sandy Creek areas is the only one in this category. Additional areas have been and may be yet identified by the public for consideration during plan revision.

### **V. Development of Alternatives**

The alternatives presented in the forest's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will portray a full range of responses to significant issues. The range of alternatives will include one that continues current management direction, as well as others that address the range of issues developed during the scoping process. The Draft Environmental Impact Statement will examine the effects of implementing strategies to achieve different overall desired conditions for the forest, including possible management practices and objectives that move the forest toward desired conditions. A preferred alternative will be identified in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

### **VI. Involving the Public**

The objective in this process for public involvement is to create an atmosphere of openness where all members of the public feel free to share information with the Forest Service and its employees on a regular basis. An active dialogue with the public will enable the forest to gather ideas, concerns and determine public attitudes and encourage public involvement in a planning process that fully integrates the needs and values of all segments of the public, including low-income, minority and historically underserved communities.

The Forest Service is seeking information, comments, and assistance from Federal, State, and local agencies, Indian tribes, and other individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by the proposed action. This input will be utilized in the preparation of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. The range of alternatives to be considered in the DEIS will be based on the identification of significant public issues, management concerns, resource management opportunities, and plan decisions specific to the National Forests in Mississippi. Public participation will be solicited by a variety of methods, including notifying in person and/or by mail, known interested and affected publics. News releases will be used to give the public general notice, and public scoping meetings will be conducted as deemed