

Phoenix Environmental Analysis and Decision Making (EADM) Workshop

External Talking Points

150 leaders from all levels of the Forest Service and from every region and staff area convened in Phoenix, AZ, Sept. 26-28 for a workshop on environmental analysis and decision making processes.

- This change effort was initiated by the National Leadership Council (NLC). NLC is made up of the highest level Forest Service leaders.

At the meeting, Chief Tony Tooke announced an agency-wide focus on how we engage in project design, regulatory compliance and public engagement to get more work done on the ground.

- He stated the Forest Service will continue to deliver scientific based, high quality analysis with meaningful results that honor our stewardship responsibilities. He said we will engage with our partners to help achieve these goals.

The Workshop focused on efficiency of planning, policy and implementation—leveraging capital and human resources appropriately, strategically focusing and organizing our work and continuing to work closely with our partners to identify solutions.

- The goal is to make decisions that authorize projects in a timelier manner, to eliminate unnecessary processes and steps, to increase the scale of analysis and the amount of on-the-ground work covered by analysis and decisions.

The issues around environmental analysis and decision making have been discussed for over 30 years. The meeting in Phoenix is part of Forest Service recognition of rapidly changing social and environmental conditions.

- The goal to have in place a comprehensive, national approach to reforming our agency culture, policies, and procedures for implementing laws and regulations with the realities of current and future on-the-ground resource objectives and public benefits by winter 2018/spring 2019.

The National Leadership Council sponsored the workshop and engaged directly with participants to hear issues and concerns and to encourage innovation.

- Meeting participants spent the first half of the first day hearing leadership intent and context for the Workshop.
- The second half of the first day and the second day, they condensed the topics into focus points.
- The third day, they drafted actions that will help bring all Deputy Areas (NFS, R&D, S&PF) to increase the pace at which we can analyze and implement needed projects.
- Emphasis items included partner involvement in creating solutions and using science to inform decision-making.

Other actions being taken include reforming our NEPA policies and implementing directives to reduce unnecessary process and analysis, align to standard government practice, expand agency authorities, and expedite decision making.

- We are reforming internal Agency-wide training based on reformed policy.
- We have prioritized existing capacity to better deliver outcomes from the regional and national levels in 2018—we are modernizing and streamlining our CE and EA documentation process.
- Chief Tooke stated we will actively engage with partners beginning fall 2018 to help with changes.

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The Forest Service is interested in and recommends that the Secretary of Agriculture convene an interagency task force with DOI and DOC to effect even more procedural efficiencies for ESA compliance for Forest Service projects. The proposed task force would:

- Develop Counterpart Regulations/Alternative Procedures or a Programmatic Consultation Agreement for projects with a primary purpose of ecosystem restoration.
- Develop procedural guidance for Proactive Conservation/Section 7(a)(1) consultation approaches.
- Use the implementing regulations of the ESA to develop “alternative” procedures for consultation for Agency projects that are designed to be congruent with FSM 2020 (Ecosystem Restoration Policy); or, programmatically address a suite of management activities/projects that are consistent with FSM 2020.

As a result of these actions, the Forest Service will reduce timeframes and costs associated with our environmental analysis and decision making and increase the acres or projects authorized by these decisions.

- The performance and training reforms that are within current agency authorities will result in a 10% efficiency gain in time and expenditures in FY18.
- Policy reforms conducted by the agency will take 6-12 months to fully complete and result in an additional 10-20% efficiency gain in time and expenditures by FY19-20