

Planning Nuts and Bolts: Monitoring and Evaluation

We've discussed plan implementation, your plan is now out there on the streets. It's being used by all those collaborators and cooperating agencies and BLM ID team, themselves; all the programs, all the resources are using your plan and now it's time to talk about plan monitoring and evaluation. So we're going to monitor and evaluate those land use decisions that were made in the plan.

Objectives, so objectives of this section include identifying appropriate monitoring techniques and also identifying approaches to evaluating those decisions that you made in your plan.

So what you see on the slide here is something that is completely unexpected; something that you can't really plan for, but does happen. So natural disasters, changes in the plan area do occur, even those natural disasters or events that you can predict a little more frequently than Mount St. Helens. But, natural disasters such as wildland fires are difficult because they have, sort of, an undetermined effect on resources. You're not sure exactly how your resources are going to respond to events like these, so it's difficult to plan for them. So we're going to talk about that in just a little bit as we go through monitoring.

Changes in recreational patterns and uses; so as time goes on, the public, the recreating public, not only changes the types of recreational activities that they do, but they also change the intensity to which they actually recreate. So you have to consider that the recreating public is probably going to change their use patterns. You're going to have things like geo-caching; you're going to have recreational shooting and hunting; you're going to have things such as the public requesting to throw bowling balls out of Cessnas onto your plan area. All those things need to be considered as part of your monitoring program.

Changing demographics, the demographics are shifting across the country. People are moving from place to place. The demographics, the numbers and types of individuals, the age classes, and their interests are going to shift over time and during the life of your plan. So those things also have to be considered as part of your monitoring plan.

So first, a definition of monitoring. Monitoring is, really, the process of tracking implementation of those land use plan decisions. And it's also collecting information and data that's necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of those plan decisions in meeting the desired outcomes. Well, why is monitoring important?

Well, monitoring actually links into the adaptive management and the modification to the plan decisions. Remember, we previously discussed adaptive management and how as things changed and as information comes in, you modify your plan decisions in order to meet your desired outcomes. Planning is a dynamic process, it's an iterative process and it requires monitoring and modification of those planned decisions. On-going data collection is really an essential part of the planning cycle itself

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and feedback and information is really the first step in making adjustments to your plan decisions.

Legal requirements of planning; well, it's found in the CEQ NEPA regulations. It requires a monitoring and enforcement program and that must be summarized in your record of decision. The planning regulations identify the requirement for on-going monitoring and evaluation of the approved land use plans and those decisions. Documentation of monitoring is required at least annually and a five year planning evaluation report is required. Chapter 10 of your land use planning handbook has further information regarding the legal requirements.

Types of monitoring; let's talk about the three types of monitoring: Implementation, effectiveness, and then finally, the plan evaluation.

Implementation monitoring; you're asked the question, where are the specific activities that are in your plan carried out? So implementation monitoring is a process of tracking and documenting the implementation of the land use decisions that are in your plan. The effectiveness monitoring, effective monitoring is completed annually and you complete either a tracking log or a tracking report that should be made available to the public. This report describes the management actions that you proposed and that were undertaken to implement plan decisions. And also, reports on what further actions that may be needed, basically, to continue the implementation of those decisions to meet those desired conditions.

Effectiveness monitoring; effectiveness monitoring can be summed up by asking the question, were specific activities carried out successfully in achieving those objectives that were in your plan. It's a process that requires the collection of data to determine whether or not desired outcomes are being met as the management actions are being implemented through time. It requires the development of indicators of change, thresholds, and time frames that we use to evaluate decisions. And determine whether or not desired outcomes are actually being achieved.

The elements of effective monitoring plan include identification of the resources that are going to be monitored. Indicators, that we mentioned before, of change, thresholds. Who is going to be responsible for the monitoring? BLM staff, the collaborators, the cooperating agencies? A schedule of monitoring activities needs to be developed and included. It's important to remember that this type of monitoring can be expensive. The data collection should be done the most efficient and effective way. You're going to include a budget for effectiveness monitoring in the plan. Remember, the GIS can be a very effective tool in the monitoring toolbox.

Remember, adaptive management through monitoring. We mentioned adaptive management in this section and in previous sections and it should, adaptive management is used to make adjustments to plan decisions that aren't meeting desired outcomes and desired conditions. And adaptive management actually requires on-going and continuous data gathering to be effective.

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The plan evaluation, the last and third type of monitoring. The plan evaluation is an evaluation; it's basically a review of the overall land use plan decisions and the periodic monitoring reports that are completed. And you're going to determine whether the land use plan decisions and the NEPA analysis that are in the plan and in the final EIS are still valid. Evaluation reports are completed on a five-year cycle and also to remember to include this type of monitoring in your land use plan itself.

Plan evaluation reports requirements. What are required for a plan evaluation report? Well, answering several questions helps. So our actions that are outlined in the plan being implemented. Does the plan establish desired outcomes or are those outcomes being achieved? Do the decisions continue to be correct and proper over time?

During the life of the plan, things change, resources evolve, uses evolve, and are the decisions that you had in our plan still being, are they still correct and are they still proper? Do the decisions need to be revised, based on changes in demographics, based in changes in resource uses or based on changes in the resources themselves. Or have there been significant changes in related or adjacent land use plans, including those of other agencies or Native American tribes. Is there new data available or analysis that significantly affects the planning decisions or the NEPA analysis. New inventories warranted is the result of policy changes. Are new legal mandates such as newly listed species that weren't addressed in your plan, are they now going to modify some of those desired conditions? So you may need to modify your plan decisions.

So, we have three types of plan modifications. So, when you decide that changes need to be made and implemented in your plan, you have some choices.

Maintenance. Maintenance is a plan modification that are minor technical changes necessary to keep the plan up to date. These can be done at basically any time. They're corrections to names, slight adjustments to polygons or allocations to correct errors or mistakes that might have occurred in your plan.

An amendment. An amendment is a change to objectives or standards of land use allocations. It's typically completed with an EA or an EIS and it doesn't often or usually require modifications to all the resource programs within the plan area.

And a revision. Revision is a wholesale update to the plan. It's a revision of all the management actions, all the allocations, all the plan decisions within your plan area. It's a more complicated and more complex process which is completed with an EIS.