

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision
Awareness Meeting
October 1, 2014
Antonito, CO
5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Meeting Summary**

Attendees

Forest Plan Revision Team

- *US Forest Service*: Mike Blakeman, Andrea Jones, Adam Mendonca, Henry Provencio, John Rupe, Trey Schillie
- *Peak Facilitation*: Kristin Barker, Heather Bergman
- *Spanish translator*: Perla Kopeloff

23 members of the public were also present.

Meeting Overview

Members of the public attended this kickoff Awareness Meeting to learn about and participate in the upcoming Forest Plan revision for the Rio Grande National Forest. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: 1) to inform meeting participants about the Forest Plan and upcoming revision process, and 2) to learn how community members use and value the forest, and about their key goals for the planning process.

No participants opted to utilize local Spanish translator Perla Kopeloff.

Opening Remarks

Attendees heard three brief opening remarks:

- Local District Ranger Andrea Jones welcomed everyone and stressed that the Forest Service (USFS) cares about and appreciates attendees' participation.
- Conejos County Commissioner John Sandoval spoke about the County's strong working relationship with USFS, noting that the County is excited to participate in the plan revision process.
- Peak Facilitation Group President Heather Bergman introduced herself as the meeting facilitator and gave an overview of what to expect from this and future meetings.

Presentations

Two presenters spoke for ten minutes each about the Forest Plan and revision process.

Forest Plan and Revision

John Rupe, USFS Regional Planner, explained that the Forest Plan provides a high-level guide for all decisions and activities on the Rio Grande National Forest. All projects on the forest must follow the guidelines of the Forest Plan, which is revised every 15 years and amended as needed. USFS revised the key requirements of the Forest Plan in 2012 to include aspects of ecological and biological health, resource management, and sustainable forest use. [View the presentation slides at the RGNF Plan Revision website.](#)

USFS encourages members of the public to participate throughout the Forest Plan revision process, which consists of the following five steps:

Plan Revision Step	Opportunity for Public Involvement	Associated USFS Document(s)	Timeline for Completion
Assess current and possible conditions	Participate in assessment meetings	Assessment report	Summer 2015
Propose plan changes	Participate in planning meetings	Need For Change report	Fall 2015
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process	Comment on published Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Forest Plan draft(s)	Progressive drafts of Forest Plan and EIS, culminating in Final EIS	
Address objections and make decisions	Voice objections during 60-day objection period (if desired)	Record of Decision	2017
Monitor process and revise if necessary	Ongoing		

Questions and Answers

- *How does this USFS planning process align with a similar process currently underway at the Colorado State Forest Service?* A USFS representative attends State planning meetings, and the State Forester has indicated a desire to co-host meetings related to the USFS revision process. Our plan revision process hasn't formally started yet, so direct alignment with the State revision process isn't possible yet.
- *The Rio Grande Cutthroat Trout is currently being considered for a federally endangered listing. If this listing occurs, will it affect the Rio Grande Forest Plan?* Yes, because USFS will have to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service during the plan revision process. Listing could also affect the travel management planning process, which will occur after the Forest Plan revision.
- *How closely will this Forest Plan relate to Forest Plans of neighboring National Forests?* Local and regional considerations play a role in the planning process, so plan provisions can't be completely standardized across all National Forests. We're making efforts to align our Forest Plan as closely as possible with the neighboring Carson National Forest, which is also currently revising its Forest Plan.
- *Will this Forest Plan revision occur in coordination with the Bureau of Land Management?* Yes.

Rio Grande National Forest Planning Process

Heather Bergman, President of Peak Facilitation Group, detailed the overall plan revision process and its need for meaningful public participation. [View the presentation slides at the RGNF Plan Revision website.](#) Mrs. Bergman explained that over the next year, USFS and the National Forest Foundation will host a series of public meetings to discuss specific forest management issues and areas of concern within the Rio Grande National Forest. Public participation at these meetings will help determine the scope of the planning process and will identify the key needs, values, and interests of stakeholders to be addressed in the Forest Plan. Additionally, local groups and organizations are encouraged to co-host meetings focusing on

their issues of interest. In order to accomplish its goal of engaging the public frequently in a transparent way, USFS brought in Peak Facilitation Group to ensure that meaningful public participation occurs throughout the planning process.

A new interactive web site allows members of the public to post comments, give feedback, and directly contact community members and local leaders about the Rio Grande National Forest and the plan revision process: <http://riograndeplanning.mindmixer.com/>

Questions and Answers

- *If I make a comment tonight, is it officially recorded? Or do I have to keep making the same comment at future meetings and/or on the website in order for it to be heard?* Your comments at this and all future meetings are officially recorded. You will not need to repeat comments numerous times for your feedback to be heard.
- *Are the other kickoff meetings in South Fork, Alamosa, and Saguache the same as this one?* Yes, we're hosting the same awareness meetings throughout the area.
- *Where are the announcements for future meetings posted?* Meetings are announced via local newspapers, radio stations, print flyers, the [USFS News & Events](#) website, the [Rio Grande Forest Plan Revision](#) website, and the e-mail list all members of the public are [invited to join](#).

Electronic Polling

Participants answered ten electronic polling questions identifying how individuals and their communities use and value the forest. Polling results can be found at the end of this summary.

Small Group Discussions

Participants broke into three groups to discuss questions about the Rio Grande National Forest and the plan revision process. An overview of key themes from this meeting follows; a summation of the discussions from all awareness meetings (held in Antonito, South Fork, Alamosa, and Saguache) [is available online](#).

1. How and where do you use the Rio Grande National Forest?

Common Themes: Every group mentioned firewood collection, fishing, hunting, and hiking as common uses of the forest; Conejos Canyon is the most popular area.

Additional Responses: Uses of the Forest

Camping, livestock grazing, creating art (painting and photography), ATV riding, driving, horseback riding, horse packing, entertaining company, outfitting, mushroom hunting, kayaking, residing

Additional Responses: Locations of Forest Use

Wilderness areas, Spruce Hole, from Chama to E. area around Horca, Upper Rio Grande from Creede to South Fork to New Mexico, areas adjacent to private property

2. *What roles and contributions does the Rio Grande National Forest make to this community?*

Common Themes: All groups noted that the forest provides both economic (e.g., firewood collection, tourist opportunities) and personal (e.g., scenic enjoyment, relaxation, “sanity”) benefits.

Additional Responses: Roles and Contributions of the Forest

- *Economics:* Funds community through firewood collection, tourist industry, job creation, tax basis
- *Social and cultural benefits:* Allows everyone equal access to beauty, spiritual fulfillment, “sanity,” inspiration, relaxation, education
- *Ecosystem services:* Wildlife habitat, clean water, fresh air
- *Life sustenance:* Food (hunting, fishing, gathering), heating (firewood)

3. *What are things in the current plan or how the forest is currently managed that you would like to see changed in the plan revision?*

Common Themes: Common issues include seasonal campground closures, insufficient signage and trail markings, and inadequate forest health, particularly due to excessive beetle kill.

Additional Responses: Proposals for Change in the Plan Revision

- *Campground management*
 - Give opportunities for no-host camping (e.g., open no-host part of campground).
 - Leave campgrounds open until at least October 1.
- *Forest health*
 - Address current beetle kill, and find funding to prevent future beetle kill.
 - Increase focus on general forest health management.
 - Address tent caterpillars.
- *Travel management*
 - Open roads to allow firewood retrieval by vehicle - not to hunters.
 - Increase Forest Road 250 maintenance.
- *Trail maintenance*
 - Improve trail quality.
 - Address erosion and damage due to ATV trail use.
- *Signage*
 - Improve road signage.
 - Improve trail signage and marking.
 - Put more signage at historic sites (mining sites, pre-historic sites, pioneer settlements).
- *Cooperation with individuals and businesses*
 - Increase public/private cooperation.
 - Create more Americorps and/or Vista programs.
 - Control competing forest uses (e.g., grazing in areas that need to be refurbished).

- *Miscellaneous*
 - Get rid of backcountry designation.
 - Give access to more sites for snowpack data.

4. *What concerns do you have about the Forest Plan revision process?*

Common Themes: Participants generally expressed concern that the process will be too lengthy and bureaucratic without strongly valuing local input.

Additional Responses: Concerns about the Forest Plan Revision

- NEPA process is concerning
- Should utilize volunteers
- Not publicized enough

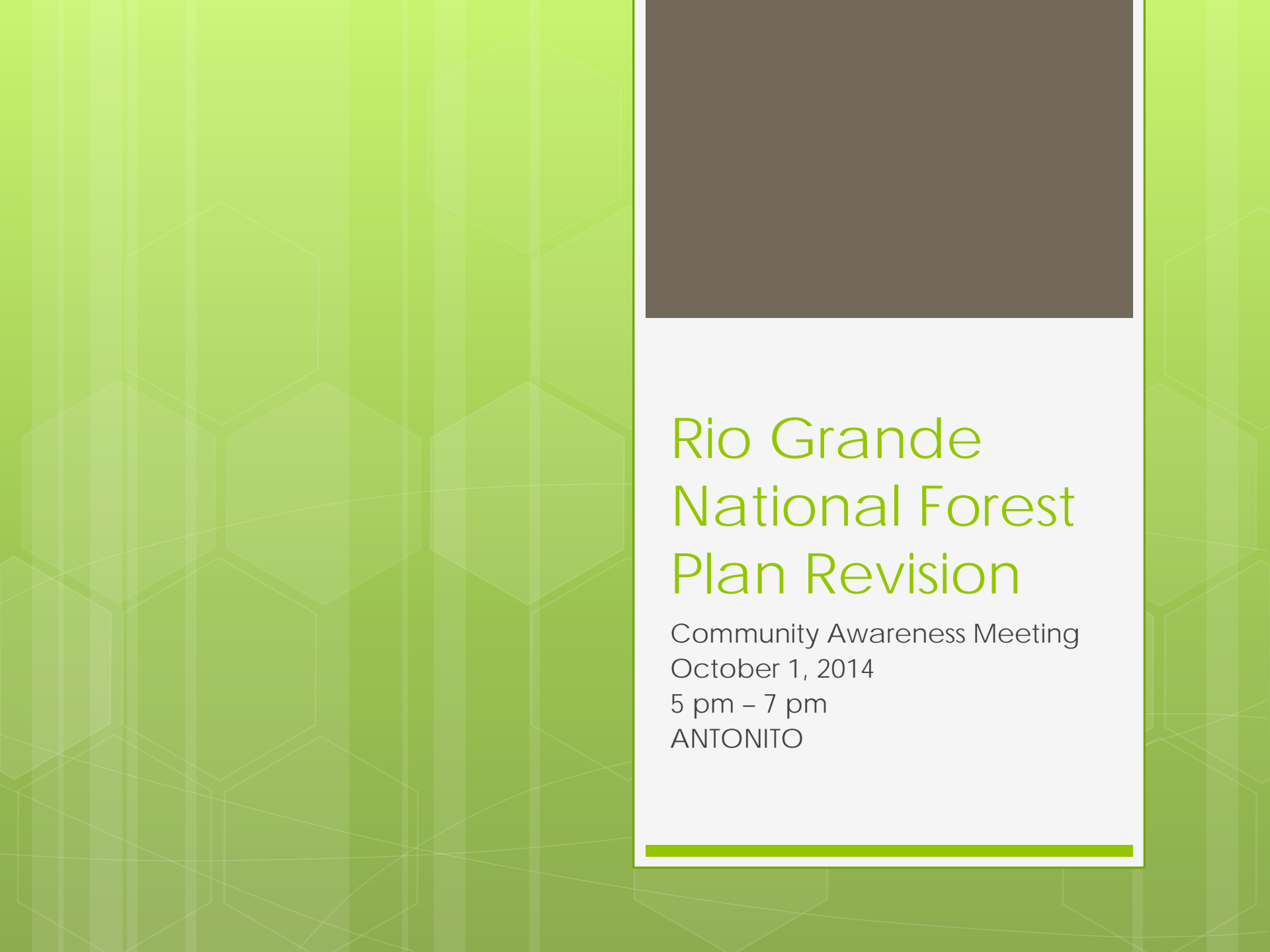
5. *If you could only tell the Forest Service one thing about the forest, how you interact with the forest, and/or the plan revision process, what would it be?*

Common Concerns:

Participants want to see a healthier forest, with more aggressive management of the recent beetle outbreak.

Additional Responses

- Focus more strongly on forest health.
- More aggressively address fire abatement and beetle kill.
 - Open more roads to harvest beetle kill, or at least allow access to pull out beetle kill (not for people to just drive all over the place).
 - Identify areas each year to clean out downed and standing dead timber, or put dead timber in a bunker that people can access for firewood.
- We have too thick a stand of trees to have trees be healthy.
- Ensure the plan revision considers the total economic impact.
 - Real estate investments (particularly taxable assessed values) could be affected.
 - Unsustainable forest management will have a negative long-term economic impact.
- Respect the forest - don't allow special interests to drive the plan.
- Worried about the pine bark beetle

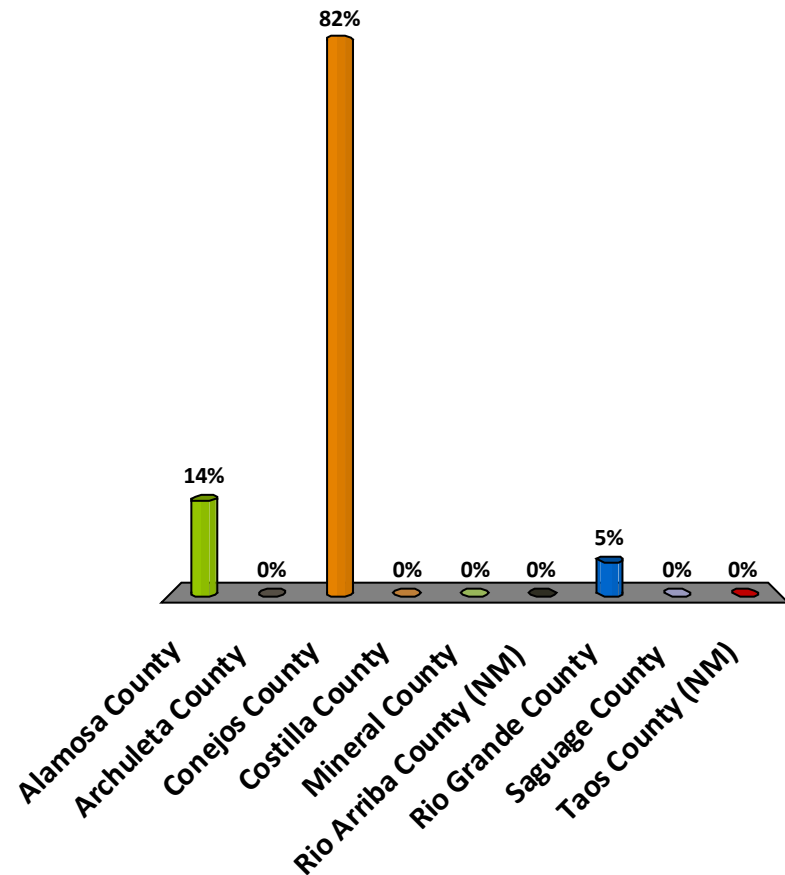


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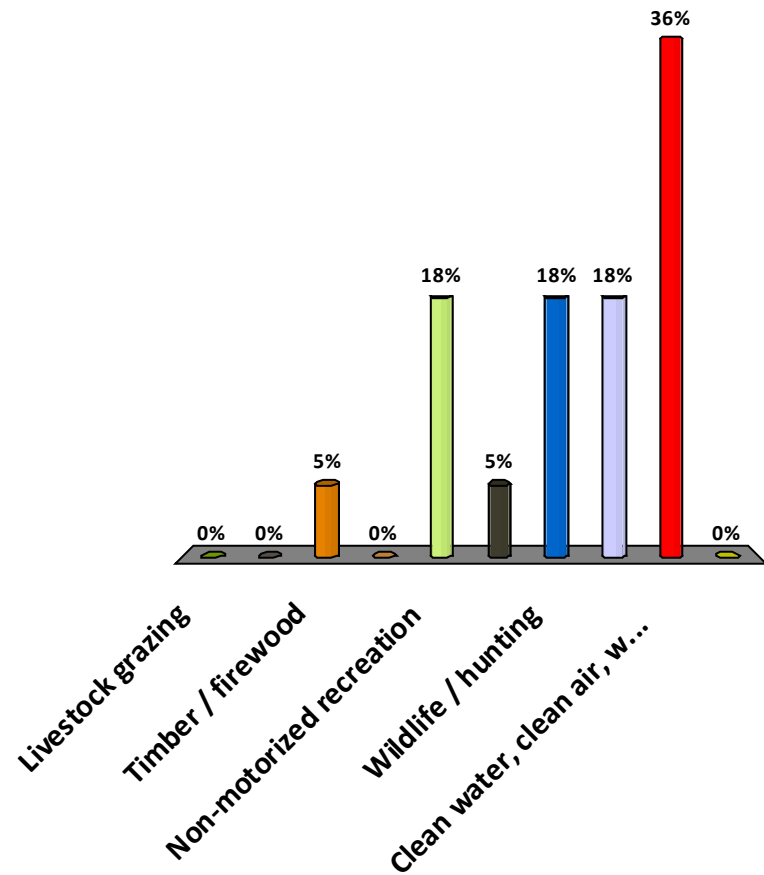
1. Where do you live?

- A. Alamosa County
- B. Archuleta County
- C. Conejos County
- D. Costilla County
- E. Mineral County
- F. Rio Arriba County (NM)
- G. Rio Grande County
- H. Saguage County
- I. Taos County (NM)



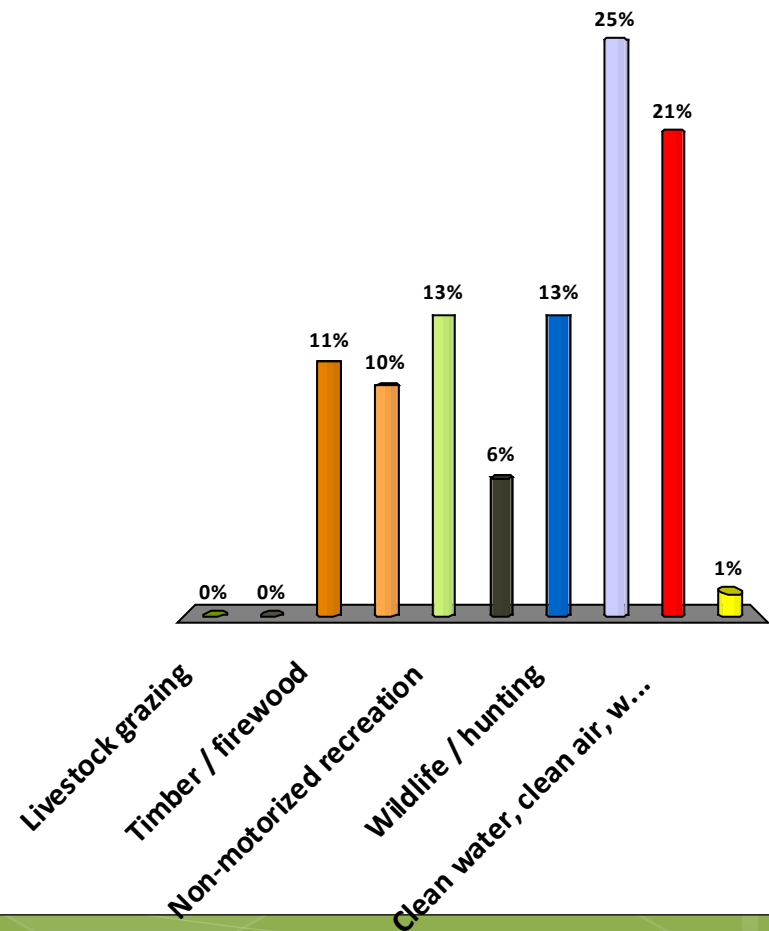
2. What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
- I. Clean water, clean air, water supply
- J. Other



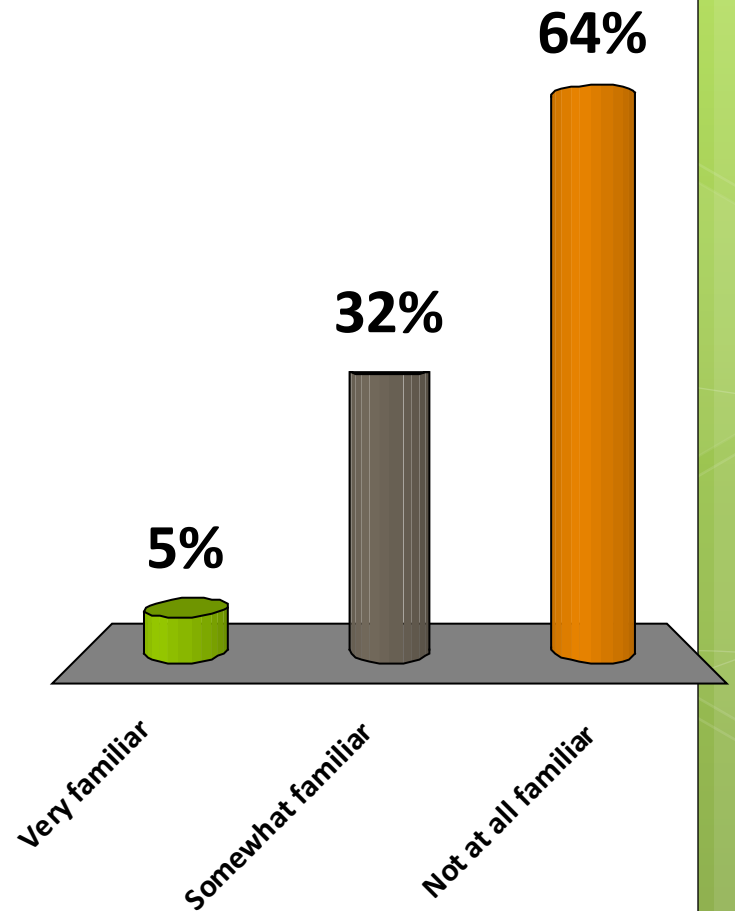
3. Which of the following are your TOP 3 interests in the Rio Grande National Forest.

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
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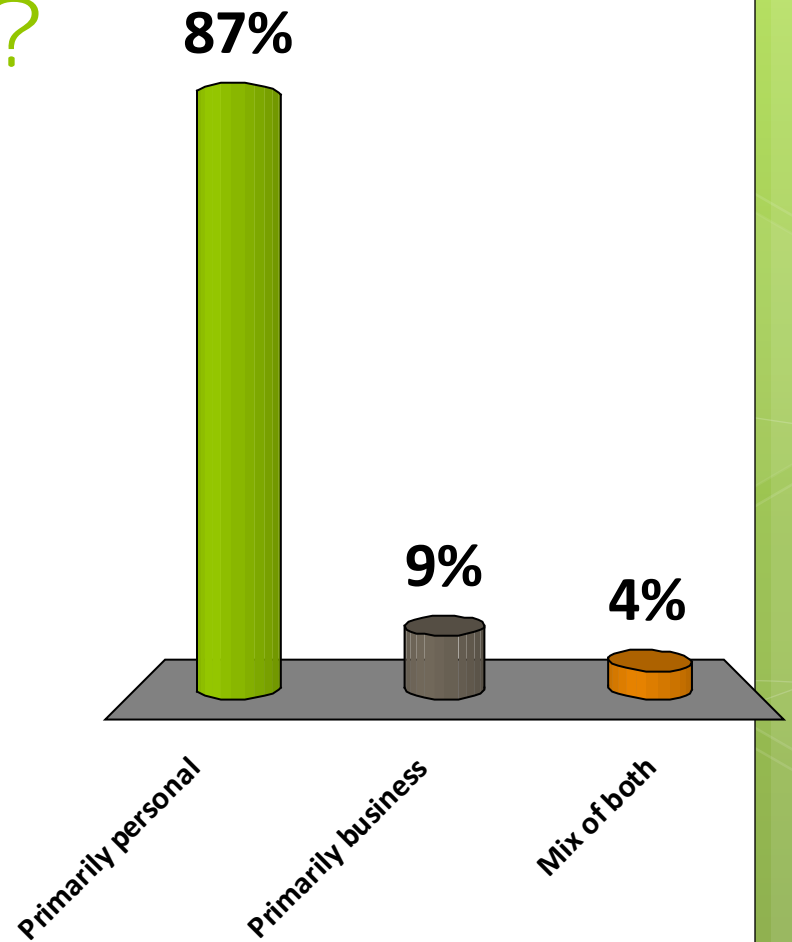
4. How familiar are you with the current Rio Grande National Forest Plan?

- A. Very familiar
- B. Somewhat familiar
- C. Not at all familiar



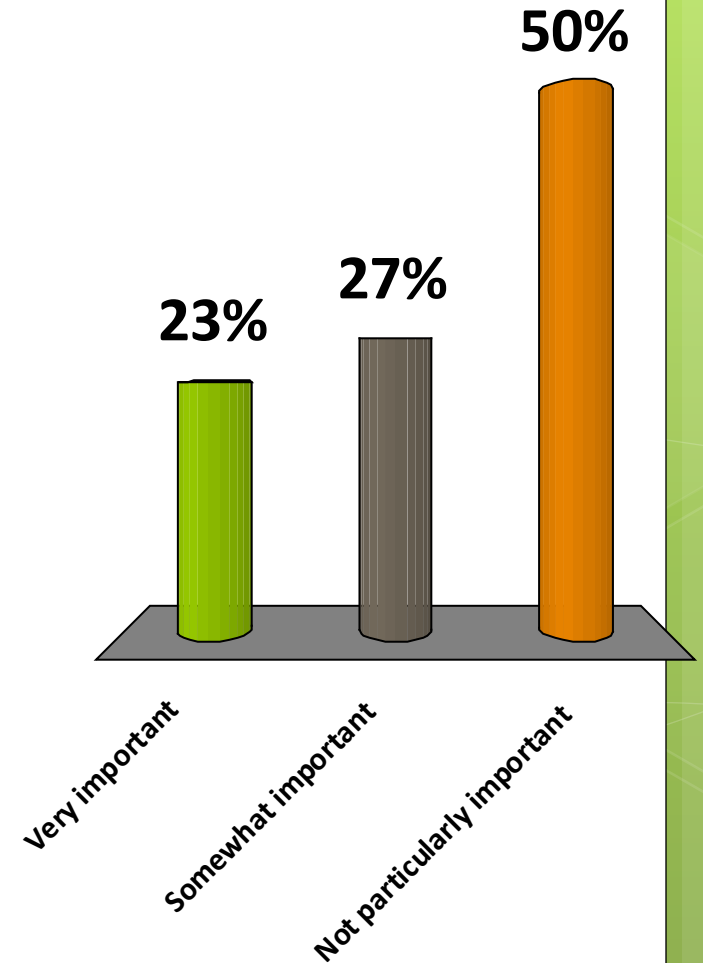
5. Do you use the Rio Grande National Forest primarily for personal or business purposes?

- A. Primarily personal
- B. Primarily business
- C. Mix of both



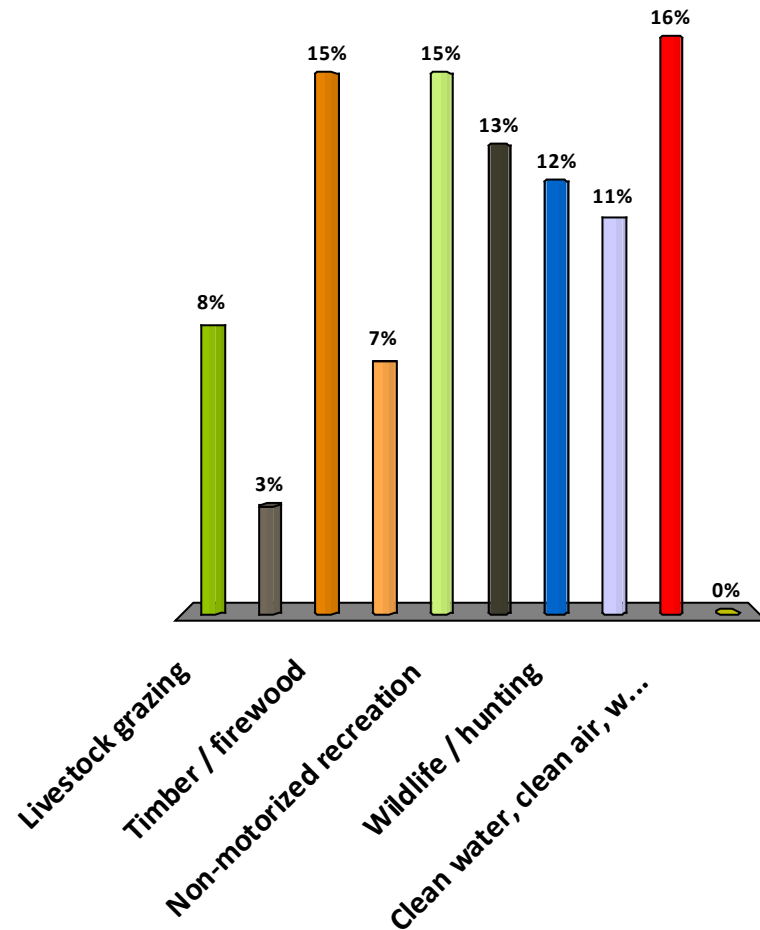
6. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your ability to make a living?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



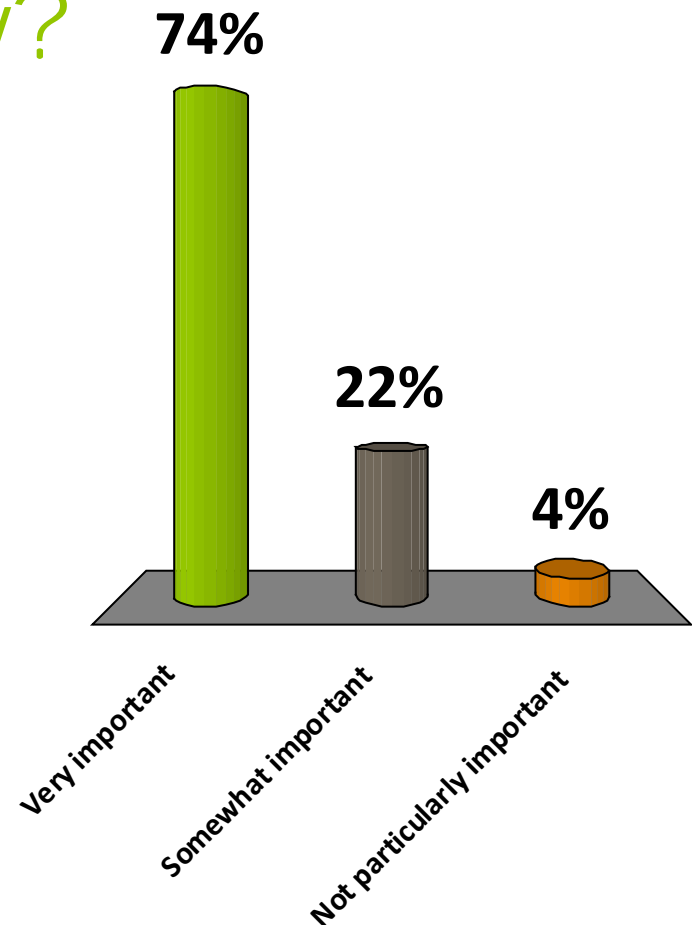
7. What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
- I. Clean water, clean air, water supply
- J. Other



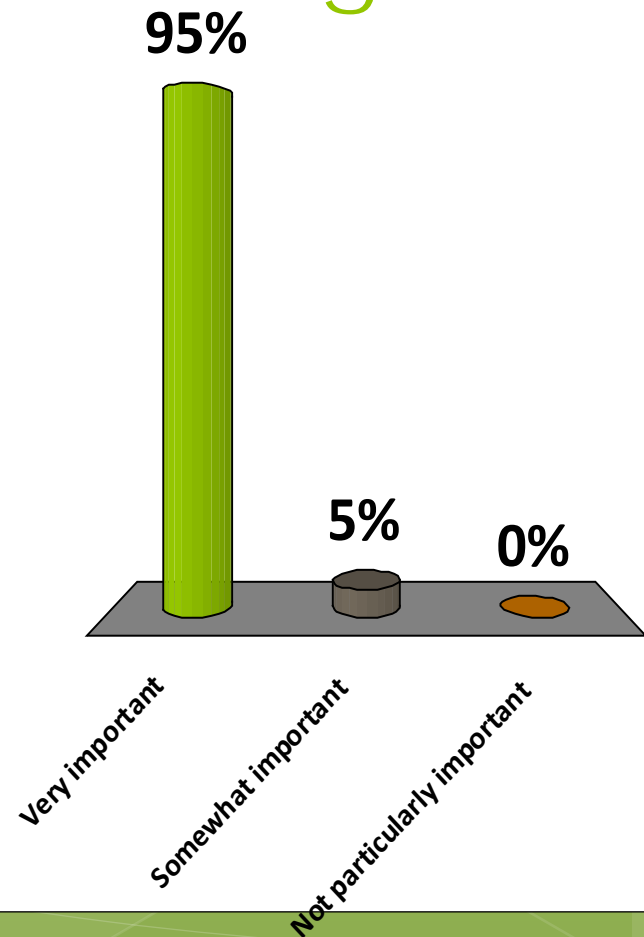
8. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's economic prosperity?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



9. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's social and cultural well-being?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



10. Which of these issues concerns you regarding the Rio Grande National Forest plan revision?

- A. Maintaining and building trust with stakeholders
- B. Maintaining multiple uses
- C. Addressing beetle kill impacts
- D. Wildfire preparation
- E. Maintaining forest health
- F. Protecting water supplies
- G. Ensuring developed and undeveloped recreation
- H. Other

