

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision
Awareness Meeting
October 3, 2014
South Fork, CO
5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Meeting Summary**

Attendees

Forest Plan Revision Team

- *US Forest Service*: Mike Blakeman, Adam Mendonca, Henry Provencio, Martha Williamson
- *Peak Facilitation*: Kristin Barker, Heather Bergman

30 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.

Opening Remarks

Attendees heard three brief opening remarks:

- Local District Ranger Martha Williamson welcomed everyone and stressed that public participation is vital to creating the best possible Forest Plan.
- Rio Grande County Commissioner Karla Shriver noted the importance of the Forest Plan to the community, explaining that the plan addresses important local issues such as oil and gas extraction, cell tower location designation, and headwaters and wildlife management.
- 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

Henry Provencio, USFS Planning Analyst, 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

- *You mentioned that the plan deals with “Special Areas” – what are they? “Special Area” is a designation for a smaller geographic area that can have special standards and guidelines. Research management areas and tribal special areas are examples of places that fall under this designation.*
- *How will the Forest Plan handle conflicting opinions and ideas? We will analyze every alternative in detail. Our goal is to integrate various options rather than choosing extremes. The Record of Decision document will explain how and why we made our final decisions.*
- *The Forest Plan lasts for 15 years, but many aspects of the forest change over a much shorter timeframe – for example, range conditions can change yearly. Is the assessment phase ongoing to accommodate these changes? The new 2012 Planning Rule requires the Forest Plan to use adaptive management; monitoring and revisions are ongoing under that type of management. We can also amend the plan more easily now if we need to. Keep in mind that the Forest Plan only works on a very high level. We use smaller-scale plans to assess and manage issues over a shorter timeframe than that covered by the Forest Plan.*
- *Where do you get the standards you use to determine ecological integrity? To maintain ecological integrity, we must be sure that all the various aspects of our ecosystems fall within their historic range of variability. We use the best available peer-reviewed science to determine appropriate standards, and we encourage the public to question the science we use if they have any concerns.*
- *The new 2012 Planning Rule is currently in litigation. What is your backup plan if an injunction is issued? Our backup plan is simply to keep the Forest Plan from 1996 in effect. However, we are planning for success and will continue to move forward with our current plan revision efforts under the new Planning Rule requirements.*
- *Do the guidelines and standards in the Forest Plan also apply to the Travel Management Plan? Yes. The Forest Plan includes standards, guidelines, and Best Management Practices that help dictate travel management throughout the forest.*

- *You mentioned a Forest Plan objective to construct 30 miles of new trails, but some existing trails are made poorly, and some trails will go away entirely, which means you really won't end up with 30 additional trail miles, right? We just gave that example to give you an idea of the type of objectives you would see in a Forest Plan; it's not a specific objective we're currently planning. But that's the exact kind of public input we're looking for as we move through the plan revision process. We really need the public to build this plan with us and help us identify and achieve all our desired objectives and goals.*

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.](#) 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 meaningful and transparent way, USFS brought in the National Forest Foundation and Peak Facilitation Group to ensure that meaningful public participation occurs throughout the planning process.

A new interactive website allows members of the public to answer questions, post comments and pictures, and be part of a conversation with community members and local leaders about the Rio Grande National Forest and the plan revision process: <http://riograndeplanning.mindmixer.com/>

Questions and Answers

- No questions were asked.

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.

Special Notes

- The “Other” response on question 7 (What are your community’s TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?) was for fishing.
- The “Other” response on question 10 (Which of these issues concerns you regarding the Rio Grande National Forest plan revision?) was for protecting wildlife.

Small Group Discussions

Participants broke into six 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 fishing as a common use of the forest; at least half the groups also use the forest for firewood gathering, equestrian uses, hiking, camping, and motorized recreation. River corridors and “the entire forest” were the most popularly mentioned areas.

Additional Responses: Uses of the Forest

- Hunting, running, backpacking, wandering aimlessly through the forest, horseback riding, rafting, skiing (downhill and back country), gathering personal landscaping materials, gathering firewood, motorized recreation (using single-tracks, ATV trails, and roads), snowmobiling, photography, painting, maintaining trails, general outdoor enjoyment, residing
- Involvement with TPA, Backcountry Horsemen, Volunteers for Outdoor Colorado

Additional Responses: Locations of Forest Use

River corridors, Spanish Trail, Natural Arch area, Pinos Creek, areas near local communities (South Fork, Del Norte, and Creede), Divide/Conejos - Forest/Divide, La Garita, San Juans, entire forest

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

Common Themes: All groups mentioned economic benefits (e.g., tourism, community funding, and jobs) and the ability for residents to enjoy nature.

Additional Responses: Roles and Contributions of the Forest

- *Economics:* Tourism, jobs, funds to support local schools, grazing, timber
- *Social and cultural benefits:* Basis of local communities (many residents are here to enjoy nature and the forest), recreation, hunting
- *Ecosystem services:* Watershed health, wildlife habitat, biomass

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 finding an appropriate balance for multiple use and addressing forest health issues related to beetle kill.

Additional Responses: Proposals for Change in the Plan Revision

- *Multiple use*
 - Have more standards/criteria for multiple use activities
 - Consider impacts of multiple use on tourism (e.g., stop allowing too many cattle to stand day after day in popular tourist locations and riparian areas such as North Clear Creek)
 - Balance motorized and non-motorized use
 - Ensure continued multiple use

- *Forest health/management*
 - Have more vision of biomass use
 - Address beetle kill (e.g., consider gasification)
 - Increase logging/fuel mitigation (currently hampering trails, grazing, and forest health)
- *Travel management*
 - Increase number of safe motorized trails in appropriate areas
 - Change trail management (both motorized and non-motorized)
 - Address ATV trail use, general use, and erosion of trails
 - Minimize off-trail game retrieval
- *Road and trail maintenance*
 - Address trail erosion
 - Have stock users maintain the trails they use
 - Use funding on existing trails rather than on building new ones
- *Forest Service actions*
 - Put more USFS personnel in the field (to prevent unnecessary shutdowns and resource abuse)
 - Complete more scientific assessments of Forest Service actions
 - Practice active management rather than becoming embroiled in paperwork
 - Use more volunteers to fulfill plan components
- *Miscellaneous*
 - Increase areas for technology and create future vision for technology
 - Revise cattle grazing plans
 - Consider energy production options (e.g., biomass pellets)

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

Common Themes: Participants generally expressed concern that public input will not actually be taken into consideration and that the plan revision process takes too long.

Additional Responses: Concerns about the Forest Plan Revision

- Takes too long
- Inadequate funding
- Needs to ensure multiple use
- Public participation concerns
 - Not enough options for the public to make informed input
 - Plan will include an option never discussed with the public
 - Plan will not actually use public input
 - Minority issues will be lost in the shuffle
 - Public will never be involved in the process
 - Local input will not actually be utilized; input will come from outside sources
 - Forest Service will not follow through with promise of transparency

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: Most respondents want to see a stronger focus on forest health and a concerted effort to properly address multiple uses.

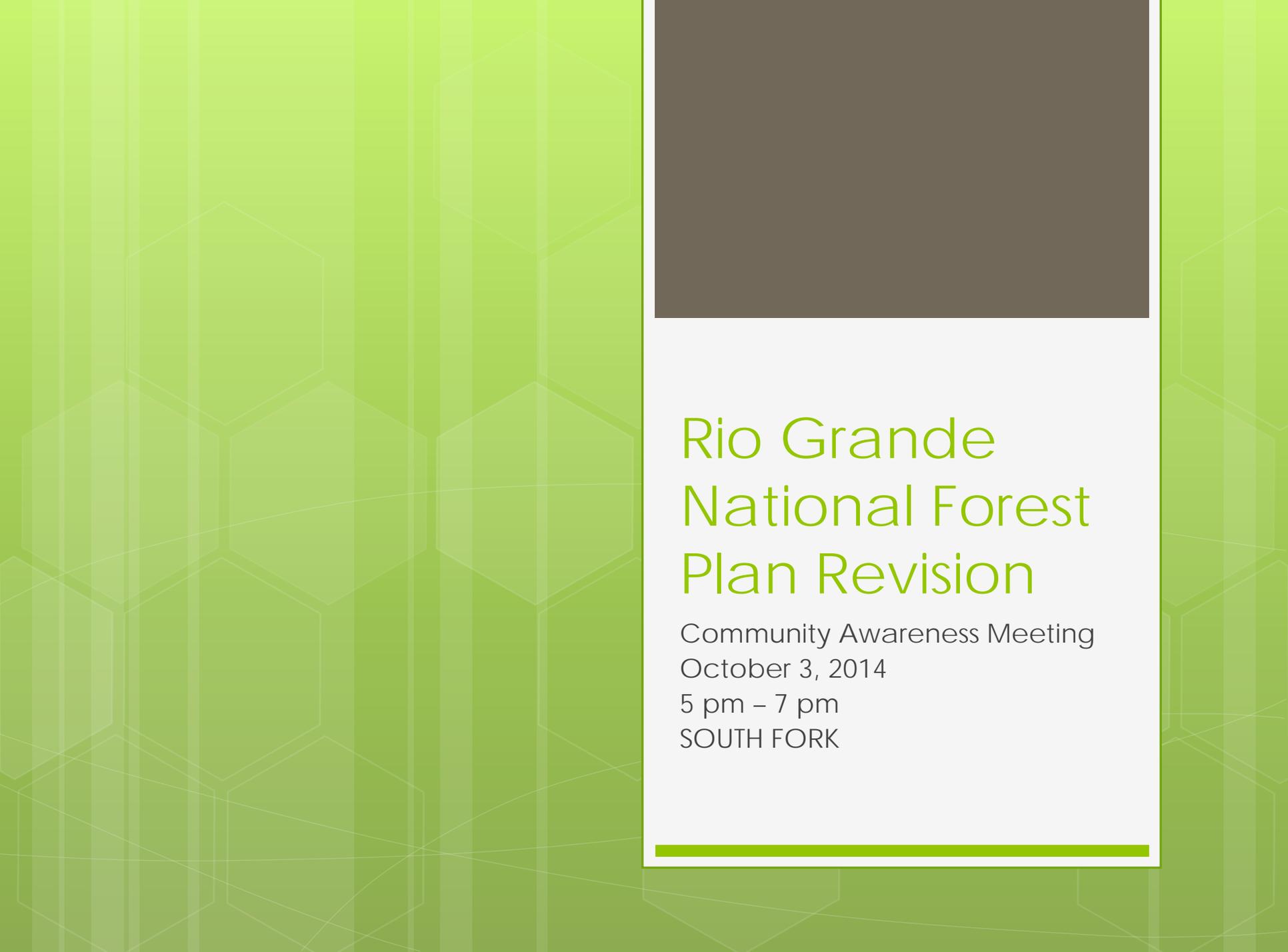
Additional Responses:

- Have more Forest Service personnel in the forest to allow and enforce responsible use.
- Avoid polarization. Listen to all sides equally. Consider multiple opinions.
- Support local communities and help make Ma & Pa industries sustainable.
- Maintain multiple use and encourage cross-use collaboration.
- Enhance trail integrity and focus on maintenance of existing trails.

Additional Comments and Perspectives

In addition to the common themes among participants and between groups that are outlined above, multiple unique comments and perspectives emerged from the small group discussions, large group discussion, and on comment cards provided at the meeting. These are listed below.

- Base access during fires on whether homeowners have defensible space.
- Have additional commercial recreation services, e.g., guided mountain biking, hiking, and rock climbing
- Have more rafting/fishing user days.
- Use a wood pellet production plant (semi-mobile) that can be moved to new areas as beetle kill wood is exhausted.
- I'd like to have the Forest Plan recognize the major hazard from fire from beetle kill. Some roads may need to be closed and others upgraded for fire. If some owners know they can't expect any protection they might be more realistic. Ideally, support fire zoning in collaboration with the counties.
- Develop several new motorized and non-motorized trails to allow for community connectivity (e.g., South Fork – Del Norte – Creede – Lake City). Not just one trail, but several.
- The Forest Service needs to help local communities generate economic viability.
- Concerns: forest health; keep roadless areas roadless; maintain existing trails rather than building new trails; have more law enforcement for motorized vehicles; protect watersheds; keep oil and gas out
- Find ways to get consumptive (cattle and sheep grazers) and non-consumptive (hikers, campers, anglers, skiers) users together to hear each other's concerns and look for ways to reduce conflicts.
- The Forest Service does a pretty good job of keeping motorized and non-motorized users out of each other's view and hearing.
- Cross-user collaboration: attempt a trail users-only meeting to identify what all trail users have in common and what would enhance their experience – keep it all positive; avoid negativity.

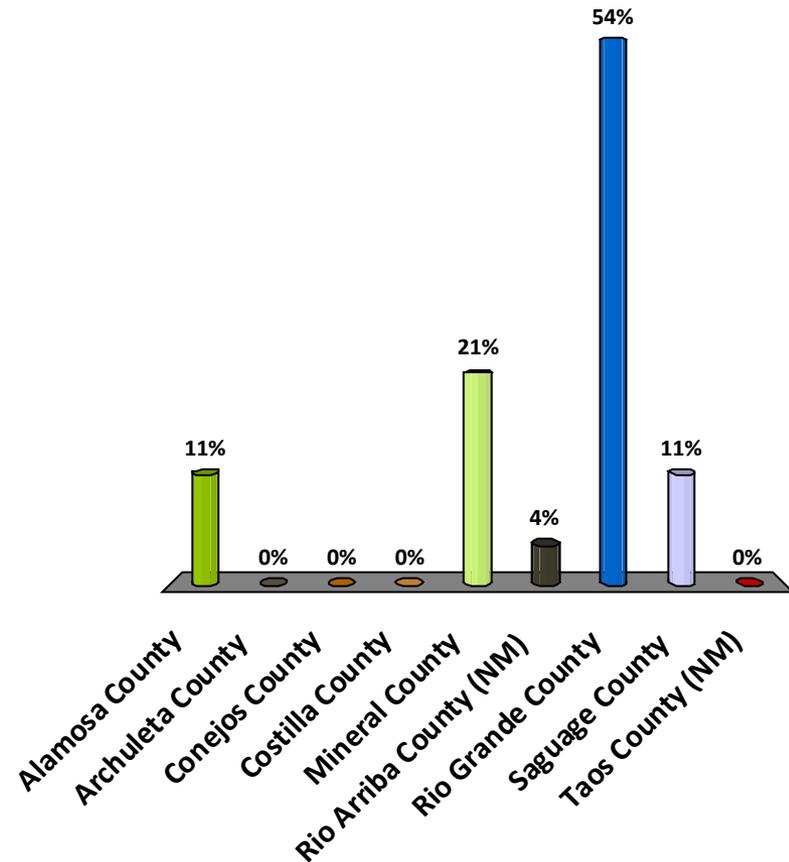


Rio Grande National Forest Plan Revision

Community Awareness Meeting
October 3, 2014
5 pm – 7 pm
SOUTH FORK

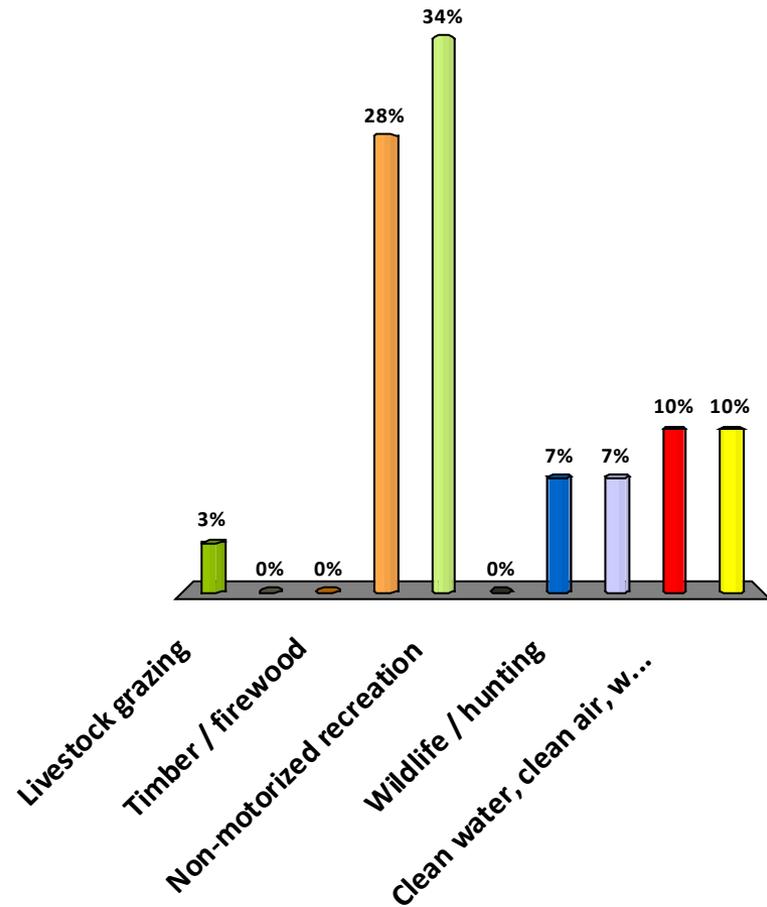
1. Where do you live?

- 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)



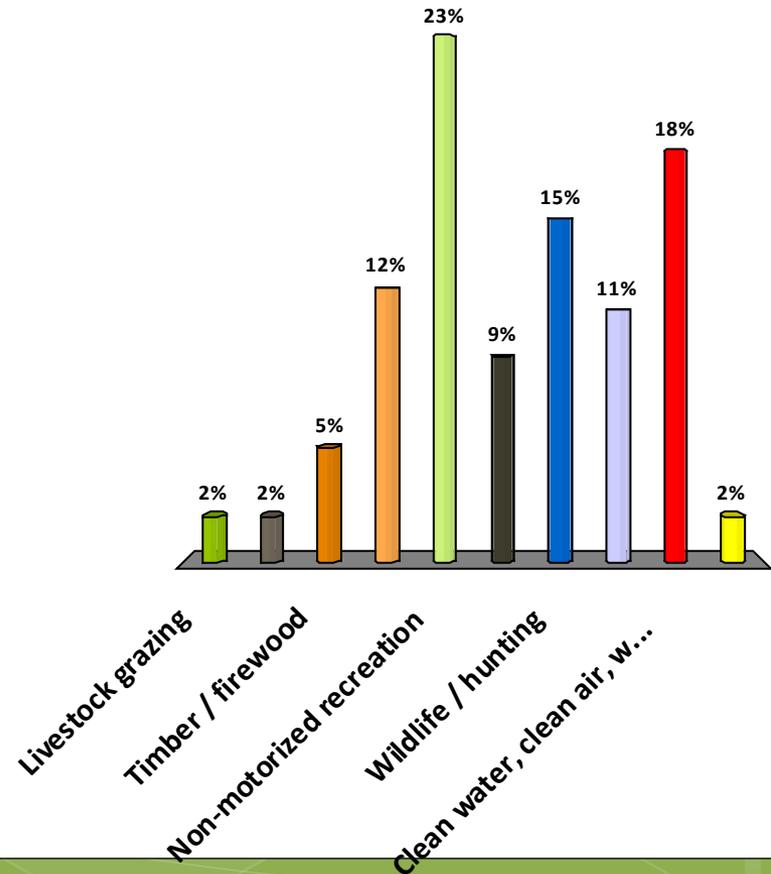
2. What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



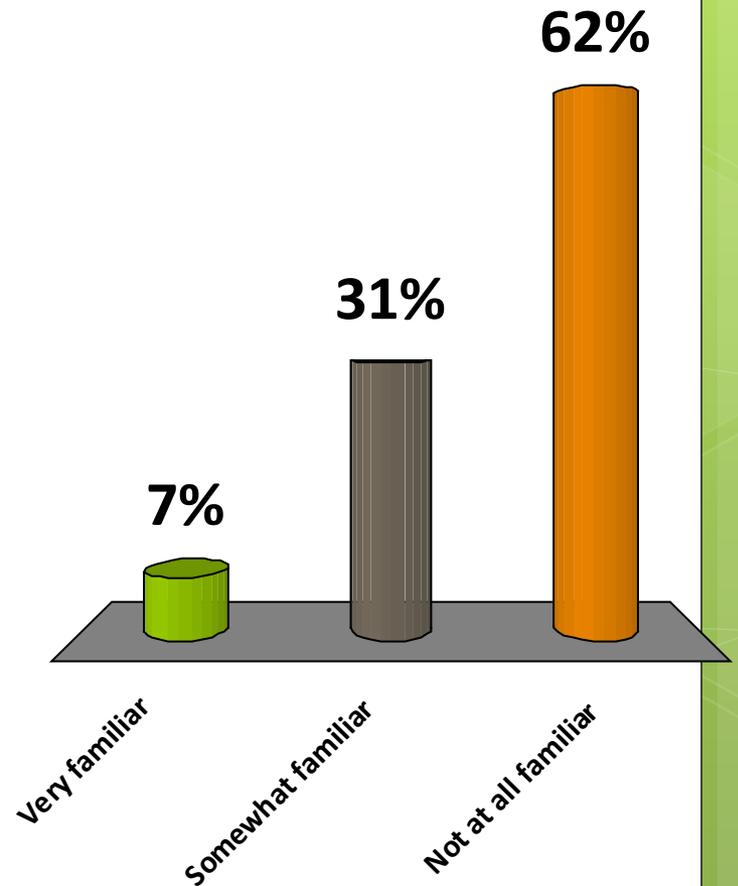
3. Which of the following are your **TOP 3** interests in the Rio Grande National Forest.

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



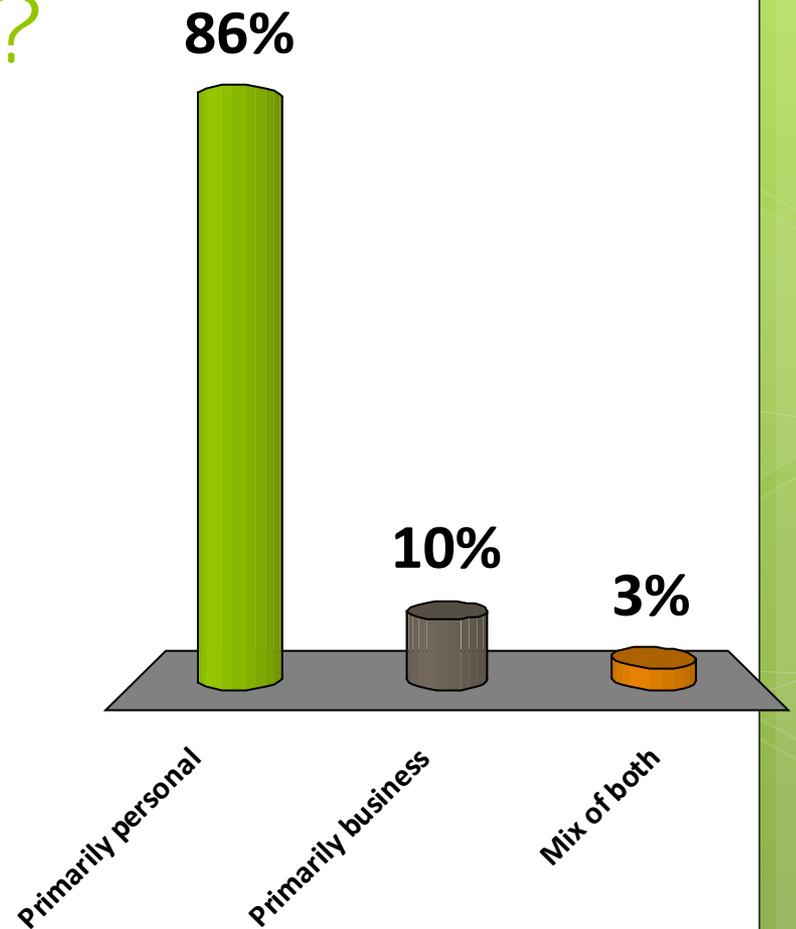
4. How familiar are you with the current Rio Grande National Forest Plan?

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



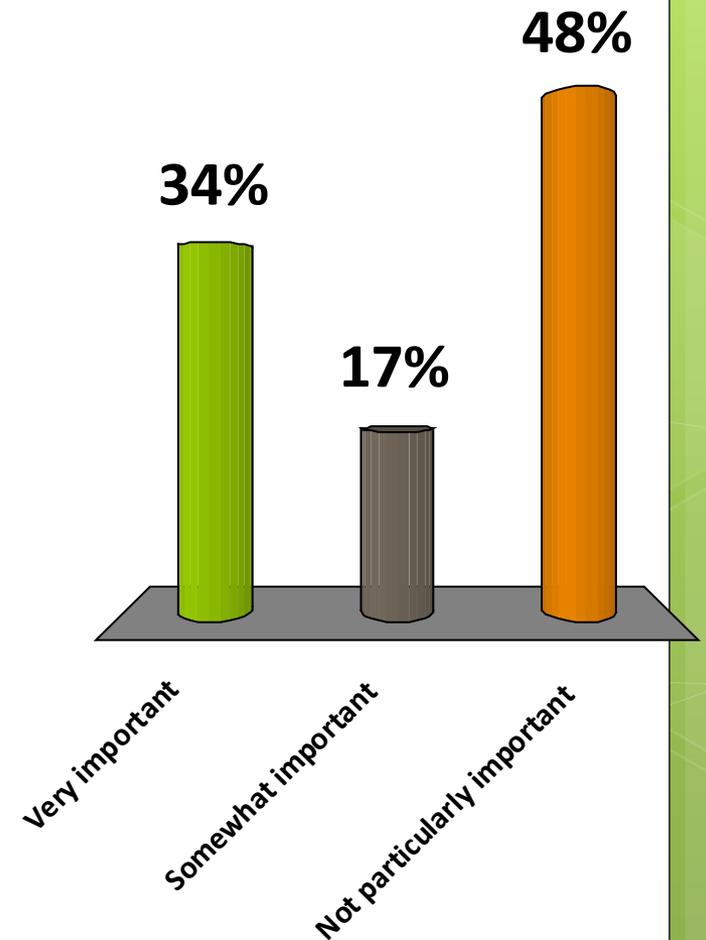
5. Do you use the Rio Grande National Forest primarily for personal or business purposes?

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



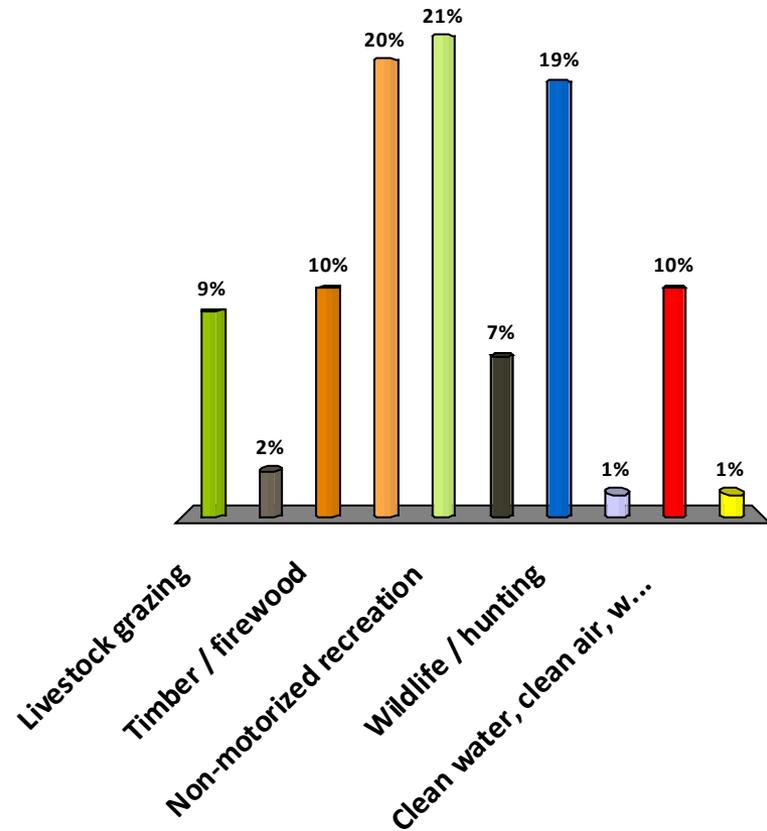
6. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your ability to make a living?

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



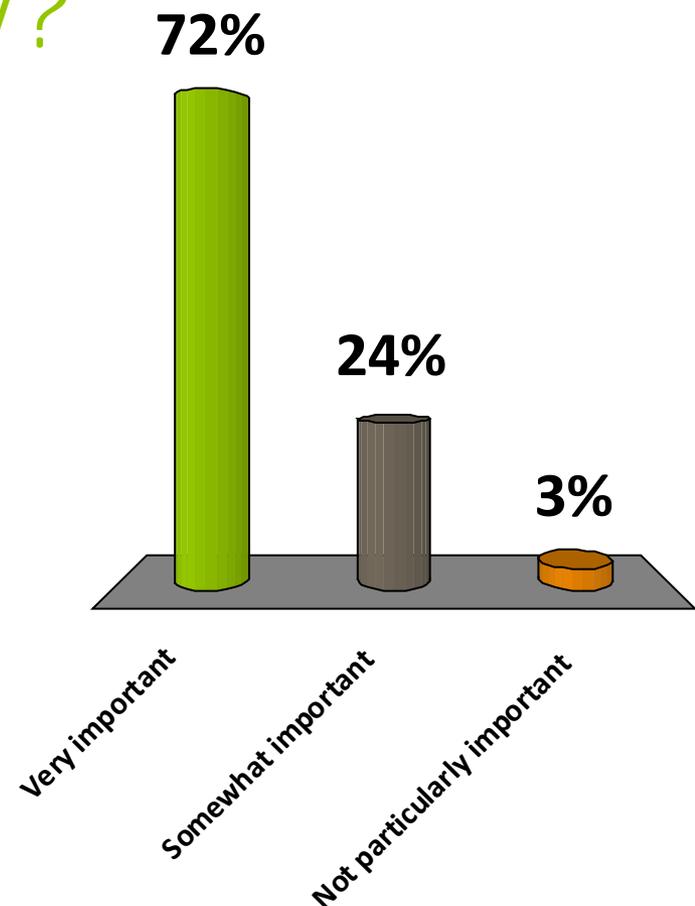
7. What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



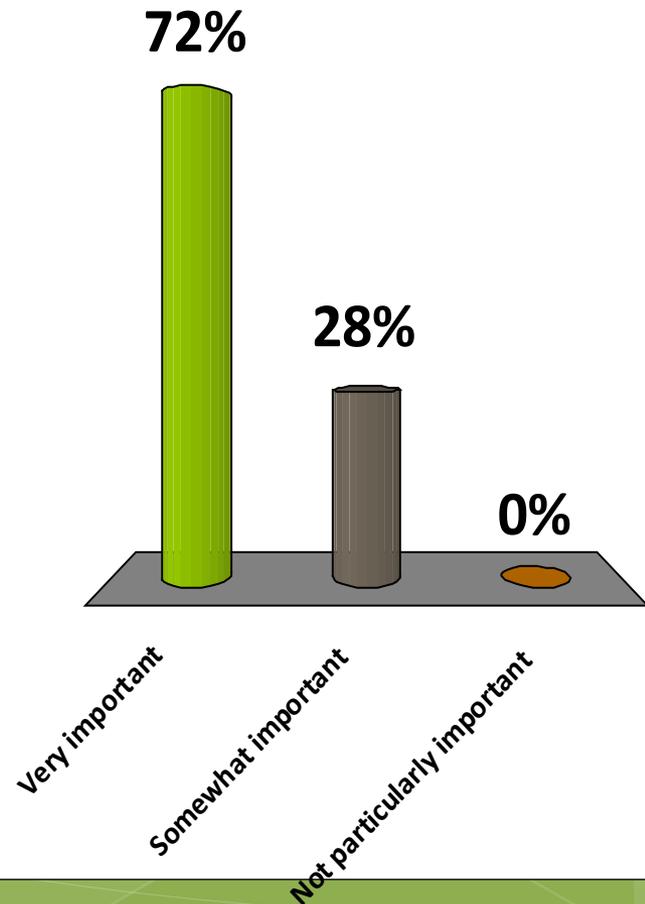
8. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's economic prosperity?

- 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

