

Stuart and Charnley

SOCIOECONOMIC MONITORING, ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT, AND THE NORTHWEST FOREST PLAN

Susan Charnley¹ and Claudia Stuart²

Introduction – One of the most common questions asked when the socioeconomic monitoring team presents the results of the monitoring program to agency managers is, “How is this information useful for adaptive management, and how can it inform management decisions?” We address this question in this presentation in the context of a broader discussion of the history of the Northwest Forest Plan (the Plan) socioeconomic monitoring program, and potential future directions.

Background – Socioeconomic monitoring associated with natural resource management and conservation is rare, and there are few examples of socioeconomic monitoring as a part of broad-scale ecosystem management plans in the U.S. Socioeconomic monitoring relating to forest management at the broad ecosystem and community scales is a field that is in its infancy. The Northwest Forest Plan socioeconomic monitoring program developed through a series of three pilot stages. The Plan was adopted in 1994, and exploratory work to develop and test a protocol for socioeconomic monitoring took place between 1999 and 2002. No monitoring data for this interpretive report began to be collected until 2003. Thus, our work is more of a retrospective assessment of Plan effects and progress in meeting socioeconomic goals, than a compilation and evaluation of monitoring data gathered during the first decade. The socioeconomic monitoring program is now poised to finalize a formal protocol for monitoring to address the relevant ROD evaluation questions, and Plan effectiveness in meeting its socioeconomic goals, to support adaptive management under the Plan and other agency management needs. This will only happen if the Regional Interagency Executive Committee and the Intergovernmental Advisory Committee decide to formally adopt a socioeconomic module as part of the Pacific Northwest Interagency Regional Monitoring Program, which they have not yet done. The decision to support socioeconomic monitoring rests in large part on whether the agencies believe that it provides valuable information that is useful for forest management.

Applications – What do the results of the socioeconomic monitoring program have to contribute to forest management under the Plan, and how can they be used by managers? The answer to this question depends in part on the scale at which management decisions are made. In our presentation we discuss several applications and uses for the socioeconomic monitoring information. For example, we discuss the relevance of monitoring changing societal values, issues, and concerns regarding federal forest management, and public perceptions of forest health and forest protection, for the adaptive management process. We show how understanding socioeconomic conditions and trends in forest communities, how forest management policy affects them, and the implications of these trends for forest management can inform the decision-making process. We demonstrate how documenting the flow and distribution of socioeconomic benefits from federal forest lands makes it possible for agencies to assess their contributions to social and economic wellbeing in forest communities, and whether these contributions are consistent with management goals. We point out lessons learned from monitoring and evaluating Plan mitigation measures and collaborative processes, and how they could be applied in the future. We also suggest how socioeconomic monitoring results can be used to better understand the interdependencies between healthy forests and healthy communities. Finally, we discuss socioeconomic monitoring as a process that helps build relations between agencies, federal forests, and communities.

Future Directions – In discussing future directions for the socioeconomic monitoring program it will be important for agencies and other stakeholders to engage in discussions about whether the ROD socioeconomic monitoring questions are still relevant a decade later, and whether the Plan’s socioeconomic goals are still important ones that should be incorporated into ongoing forest management in the Pacific Northwest. We conclude our presentation by reflecting on these topics.

STATUS & TREND REPORTS CONCURRENT SESSIONS- Socioeconomic Monitoring

¹ USDA Forest Service Pacific Northwest Research Station- Box 3890, Portland, OR

² USDA Forest Service Region 6, Genetic Resource Center- 2741 Cramer Lane, Chico, CA