Transforming agency culture:
The development of the US Forest Service’s sustainable recreation priorities and research agenda

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Outdoor recreation is by far the single greatest use of the National Forest System, dwarfing every other use. The number of recreation visits on the National Forest System rose from about 5 million in 1925 to nearly 149 million today. That’s a growth rate of nearly 3,000 percent. Not surprisingly, it is also the single greatest employer, and it provides the single greatest stimulus for local economies.

Visitors today engage in activities such as hiking, camping, picnicking, skiing, hunting, fishing, horseback riding, wildlife watching, visiting cultural sites and visitor centers, or just viewing the scenery and driving for pleasure. But the kinds of recreation the public wants are far more diverse than they were in the early 1900s. Think zip-lining and snowboards, OHVs and snowmobiles, rafting trips or guided backcountry trips, with gourmet meals and llamas carrying everything but your daypack.

230 MILLION Americans live within 100 miles of a National Forest or Grassland
115,000 activity locations
158,000 miles of trails
380,000 heritage sites
2 MILLION acres of lakes
200,000 miles of fishable streams
36.5 MILLION acres of wilderness
1 MILLION camping reservations through Rec.gov in 2015
122 Wild and Scenic Rivers
136 National Scenic Byways covering 9,100 miles
60% of all downhill skiing capacity in the U.S.
Focus Areas

• Restore and adapt recreation settings
• Implement “green operations”
• Enhance communities
• Invest in special places
• Forge strategic partnerships
• Promote citizen stewardship
• Know our visitors, community stakeholders, and other recreation providers
• Provide the right information
• Develop a sustainable financial foundation
• Develop our workforce
Generative Spiral Model v 5.0

**LIVING PROCESS**

*Phase III: Activate Design And Deliver Innovation*

- **Create Sustaining Infrastructure**
  - Venturing, replication, sustained learning

- **Deliver Design**
  - Implement and take action

- **Allocate Resources**
  - Detailed design
  - Articulate activities, connections, flows, metrics
  - Communication plan
  - Mature collective leadership

- **Broaden Alliances**
  - Seek council
  - Deepen Agreements

- **Refocus and Reframe**
  - Create breakthrough
  - Reset intentions
  - Transform the plan

- **Prototype and Ground**
  - Rapid prototyping and experiments
  - Create practice fields

- **Transform History**
  - Feel, name and Transform stuck Structures and shadows

**AWARENESS**

*Phase I: Create a Center*

- **Initiation**
  - Identify the deep potential

- **Discovery**
  - Map current reality
  - Focused exploration and analysis
  - Gather resonant networks

- **Container**
  - Form a conscious core group

- **Whole System Design**
  - Draft creative brief
  - Identify sequence of creative actions

- **Broaden the Inquiry**
  - Widen the story; seek disconfirmation
  - Engage key stakeholders
Traditional model

- Caring for the Land and Serving People
- Evolution of Forest Service Identity
- Balancing Preservation/Conservation and the public’s discovery of the forests
- Visitation of and Access to the Forests
- Definition of measures and targets relevant to the work at hand
- Definition of Multiple Use as Society Changes
- Conserving Forests and the Development of a Fire Strategy
Engaging Communities and the Emerging Role of Recreation

- The emerging role of Recreation in Outdoor Experiences
- Need for urban communities to Experience the Outdoors
- Restoration, Diversity & Inclusion
- New indicators to match FS work with developing trends
- Conserving Forests and the Development of a Fire Strategy
- Need for rural communities to Reconnect with Forests
- Connector of Public to the Land
- Developing a Values driven and Citizen driven focus
- Caring for the Land and Serving People
- Balancing Preservation/Conservation and the public's discovery of the forests
- Visitation of and Access to the Forests
- Engaging people and communities to empower citizen support for natural resource conservation
Essential Tension

Identity is Destiny. Who we think we are is who we become, through behavior, beliefs, and values. Having a common shared identity will set a path for employees and the public.

Caring for the Land and Serving People

Values that Americans want from their forests and grasslands

Traditional Identity

Understanding long-term traditional users' (e.g., hunting, fishing, etc.)

Preservation: ‘Public is the Problem, Rare Non-traditional Users are the Solution’

Access to the forests in general

New Users of the Forests

Interest in learning about forests after a fire

Returning value from lands & Afghanistan

Innovating the 1st role of a test

Health and Welfare Benefits

Experiencing the Great Outdoors

3 Synergies

1. Can do

Connecting People to Public and the Land

Involvement of Citizens and Volunteers

Let them in, learn from the users

Balancing Preservation and the Public's Discovery of the Forests

Engaging people and communities in a way that empowers citizens and support for natural resource conservation

Creation of Recreation Professionals

Themes of Engagement for Communities (e.g., Value of Watersheds, Trees, Trails in the Forests)

Policy of tight every fly

Big Unbearable Fires

Creation of fire professionals

Development of a fire strategy

Caring for the Land and Serving People

Share the Conservation Story in ways that awaken and strengthen all people's connection to the land

Locally directed

Locally directed

5 Synergies

Recreational

Recreational

Education

Identity

Plan your Efforts and Identity

5 Synergies

Recreational

Recreational

Education

Identity

Plan your Efforts and Identity
Modernize the Special Uses Program.

Implement citizen access through system of recreation roads and trails.

Increase capacity and focus on volunteers and stewardship.

Renew strategy to implement digital innovations.

Leverage resources and investments in key Iconic Places.
Setting a Sustainable Recreation Research Agenda

Vision: A research strategy focusing on provision of sustainable recreation opportunities that enhance the quality of visitor experiences while moving communities and public land management toward more sustainable and relevant management.
Research Agenda Themes

- Benefits to a Diverse Public
- Management and Planning
- Data Collection & Technology, Encouraging Recreation Technology
- Ecological Integrity
- Catalyzing Partnerships
- Fiscal and Resource Capacity
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Deliver Benefits to the Public

Strategic Objective D. Provide abundant clean water
Strategic Objective E. Strengthen communities
Strategic Objective F. Connect people to the outdoors
Evolution of USFS Identity

Urban Discovery of the Forests
Dispersed Rec, Managing Land as use is discovered
Caring for the Land (Protecting)
Learning What Recreation is in the Forest
Let Them in, in a Sustainable Way
Connecting people to the Land by Facilitating Outdoor Experiences

Outdoor Experiences; Especially for the Urban Populations
Off Road Vehicles Geocaching Base Jumping Etc.
Local Parks and Volunteering are Gateways to the Forests

Evolving the Identity of the USFS in Relation to a Definition of “Serving The People”