Recreation Opportunity Spectrum and Sustainable Recreation in Planning

Prepared for:
2019 National Outdoor Recreation Conference Society of Outdoor Recreation Professionals
The USDA Forest Service Mission

To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation’s forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.

“Caring for the Land and Serving People”
We provide recreation on treasured lands that brings health and vitality to individuals and communities and showcases our country’s natural abundance. Recreation on the National Forests and Grasslands invokes feelings of connection to the natural world and inspires responsibility to care for it.
Sustainable Recreation
(2012 Planning Rule for the Forest Service)

The set of recreation settings and opportunities on the National Forest System
that is ecologically, economically, and socially sustainable for present and future generations.

The social, managerial, and physical attributes of a place that, when combined, provide a distinct set of recreation opportunities. The FS uses Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) to define recreation settings and categorize them into six distinct classes...
An opportunity to participate in a specific recreation activity in a particular recreation setting to enjoy desired recreation experiences and other benefits that accrue. Recreation opportunities include non-motorized, motorized, developed, and dispersed recreation on land, water, and in the air.

Sustainable Recreation and the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum

FS Planning Directives clarify that sustainable recreation is derived through the integrated planning process and emerges as the resultant set of desired recreation opportunity spectrum classes.
Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS)

Management tool to define, classify, allocate, manage, and monitor a range of recreation settings and opportunities

Developed in response to 1976 NFMA requirements to integrate all NFS land uses
There are 6 main ROS classes:

- Primitive
- Semi-Primitive
  - Non-motorized
- Semi-Primitive
  - Motorized
- Roaded Natural
- Rural
- Urban
Recreation Opportunity + Setting = Experience (+ Place)

Activity + ROS Class = Ecosystem Service/Benefit

Solitude
Challenge
Self reliance

Comfort
Safety
Socializing
The “Spectrum”

- **Level of Access, development, & social encounters**
  - Minimal to High

- **Level of Remoteness**
  - High to Minimal
Recreation Opportunity Spectrum in Planning

- Describe and map existing recreation settings
- Describe and map desired recreation settings
- Framework for site-specific decisions and actions (access, infrastructure, activities, etc.)
- Monitor change between existing and desired recreation settings
Existing Recreation Settings (ROS inventory)

National ROS Inventory Mapping Protocol

- Addresses seasonal variations in recreation settings
- Identifies Issues, Concerns, and Opportunities
- Aligns with travel management decisions
- Allows for comparison across unit boundaries and multiple scales
Desired Recreation Settings
(Desired ROS)

Desired ROS classes are required in Forest Service Land Management Plans to address Sustainable Recreation.

Desired ROS classes are derived through public engagement and integration with other resource values.
Desired Recreation Settings
(Desired ROS Subclasses)

Subclasses further define the desired recreation settings and associated opportunities and benefits
Key points to keep in mind...

- ROS describes and maps existing and desired recreation settings including seasonal variations
- Desired ROS is developed through integrated resource management and important to achieve Sustainable Recreation
- ROS can monitor change between existing and desired recreation settings
- ROS is a Management Tool not just a map, a framework for future, site specific decisions (access, infrastructure, activities, etc.)
- Subclasses can address unique aspects of a specific area