

Recommendations of the Recreation Committee

Note to JAG members. August 26, 2010. My apologies for not getting these materials to you earlier. I had thought I had forwarded these materials to Russ weeks ago, but my recollection was wrong.

1. Recommend that JDSF should move as soon as possible to hire a contractor to develop a recreation plan and associated user survey.

To speed completion of the recreation plan, a contract should be let to a single contractor to do the user survey required by the FMP as an integral part of developing the recreation plan, rather than first hiring a contractor to do only the user survey.

2. Recommend policies to minimize the impacts of harvesting on recreation opportunities:
 - a. Consistent with safety and legal requirements, JDSF should maximize the time that roads and forest areas are open to non-motorized recreation in harvest areas, including during the winter non-harvest season, on weekends when safe to do so, and by scheduling THPs to “cluster” those them within a given area when environmentally appropriate.
 - b. All trails and roads with significant recreation use should receive at least the aesthetic protection measures contained in the JAG’s **Recommended Late Seral Forest Development Prescription for Brandon Gulch**, “August 8, 2008 (See Attachment 1). These recommendations should be taken as a whole, but adapted to other locations and aesthetic values. Important provisions of the recommendations are:
 - i. ... JAG recommends allowing a lighter-than-average prescription within buffer zones along roads and trails, with the prescription and operations implemented with the goal to recover visual quality in 3-5 years after harvest. The buffers zones would be 100 feet or sight-distance from the edges of the above roads or trails, whichever is less. All logging slash within the buffer shall be uniformly lopped to within 30 inches of the ground.

3. Recommend that JDSF proceed, prior to the completion of Recreation Plan process, with recreation maintenance and improvements to existing trails and facilities as needed or as recommended by the Recreation Task Force..:
4. Recommend replacing the Recreation Corridor concept of the FMP with guidelines for protecting recreation resources. There appears to be no need for or usefulness of recreation corridors.

The concept of a recreation corridor was carried over from an earlier time, when the intent was to concentrate recreation development within a specified “corridor”.

The approach favored by the JAG is that low-impact recreation can occur anywhere on the forest harmoniously with other forest management activities, so long as it does not conflict with safety or endanger sensitive habitats, including streams.

5. Recommend that twenty percent of the JDSF budget be spent on recreation staffing, maintenance, and improvement projects.

Cal Fire has historically placed a low priority on recreation. Recreation staffing and expenditures have been cut disproportionately multiple times. Currently, almost no funds are being spent on recreation. The simplest way to ensure a significant, ongoing recreation program in Jackson Forest is to specify that recreation activities receive, on average over several years, a fixed share of the budget.

A twenty percent share for recreation would provide a reasonable balance between recreation and other activities, including THP preparation and oversight. On a \$2 million budget, a minimum budget, recreation would receive \$400,000. This would support perhaps two recreation positions and a modest sum for trail and campground maintenance and improvement. On a \$4 million budget, which can be foreseen for the future, 20% would provide \$800,000 for recreation. This would support increased recreation personnel, trail and campground maintenance and improvement, as well as expansion of trails and facilities as proposed in an approved Recreation Plan.

Additional Recommendation

The following recommendation was not discussed by the Recreation Committee, because the Task Force Recommendations were not available at the time of the last meeting.

6. Recommend that the JAG support the recommendations of the User Task Force, as described in *JDSF Task Force Preliminary Recommendations*. The Executive Summary of the *Recommendations* are attached.

Forest Tilley will not be at July JAG meeting. He does not support this recommendation and asked to have his views conveyed to the JAG:

My thoughts and recommendations regarding the above subject.

I believe the Recreation Task Force suggestions should be between the Task Force and the Department.

Now that the Task Force is established and functioning I believe JAG should stay out of the way.

I must abstain from recommending the Task Force's suggestions because they go far beyond the statute and Board Policy stated in the Management Plan i.e. "recreational facilities will generally be maintained to provide a rustic and informal experience".

I recognize that the suggested recommendations form a "wish list" and would hope the Task Force realizes it would be well into the future and would take revision of the statutes and policy before it could or should be fully implemented.

It would be most appropriate for these "suggestions" to be presented to the contractor selected to develop and administer the recreational survey and prepare the short "and long-term priorities for enhancement of recreation opportunities'. I would support that recommendation.

Attachment 1: Excerpt from *Brandon Late Seral Prescription Final Report, August 8, 2008*

7. Special Considerations

Recreation and Aesthetics

Recreation use on Brandon Gulch consists primarily of two campgrounds and use of recreational trails (Roads 360, 362, and 1000, see Figure 3) used by campers, hikers, bikers, equestrians, shooters, and unauthorized use of OHVs.

The direction given in the Settlement Agreement (Appendix 2) is to ensure that: Recreation use will be considered when devising the THP amendments. Potential harvest modifications to reduce visual impact on recreation users, including but not limited to those provided by the Management Plan and the Forest Practice Rules, shall be considered for incorporation in the THP amendments.

To meet this directive, treatments should be applied in the close vicinity of campgrounds and trails to mitigate the effects of timber harvest and to enhance vegetation development that promotes desirable aesthetic and visual conditions. Concerns and suggestions provided by recreation-user comments (Appendix 7) should be considered in carrying out timber harvesting and mitigating its effects. JDSF staff will work with timber operator to reduce the visual impacts of the timber harvest.

The following elements provide additions or emphasis to the recreation guidelines in the Management Plan:

1) Roads and Trails: Roads 360, 362, and 1000, are used by hikers, equestrians, and trail bike riders and are valued for providing aesthetic experiences and views of the forest. JAG members agreed on the objective of maintaining high visual quality for trails and campgrounds. JAG considered but rejected no-harvest setbacks as a means to accomplish this objective, feeling that the adopted approach would not produce significant adverse effects, setbacks would unnecessarily constrain harvesting opportunities and operational flexibility during harvesting. In addition, JAG found that ruling out harvesting next to trails would, over the long run, prevent trail users from being able to see into the more visually rewarding late-seral forest. Thus, JAG recommends allowing a lighter-than-average prescription within buffer zones along roads and trails, with the prescription and operations implemented with the goal to recover visual quality in 3-5 years after harvest. The buffers zones would be 100 feet or sight-distance from the edges of the above roads or trails, whichever is less. All logging slash within the buffer shall be uniformly lopped to within 30 inches of the ground. Trails along streambanks are especially scenic and buffers along Brandon Gulch and the North Fork of the South Fork of the Noyo River may exceed specifications of the Forest Practice Rules to protect particular identified values. Sherwood Trail is of particular importance requiring special maintenance to prevent erosion. Trails used by equestrians should provide adequate width and overhead height clearance.

After harvest, all trails should be restored as much as possible to their original or desired condition. All trails and trailheads within Brandon Gulch should be well marked and mapped. Opportunities should be taken to provide information to the public on sustainable forest management, advancing late-seral stand conditions, and balanced resource use on portions of trails from which harvesting can be observed.

2) Existing Campsites and Day-Use Areas at JDSF provide a remarkable sense of solitude and therefore careful attention is required to ensure adequacy of setbacks. Setback size should be 200 feet within which harvesting should be excluded (Management Plan, page 275) with added sensitivity given within 300 feet (Management Plan, page 119). Prior to harvesting, onsite evaluation of potential visible impacts should be conducted by JDSF staff and one or more JAG representatives to ensure that desirable visibility screens are prescribed. These will likely vary considerably around campsites due to variability in terrain and vegetation. Thinning near campgrounds and day-use areas should be limited to enhancing understory development, future screening, and removing potential hazard trees. Planning for thinning should be controlled by visual confirmation from professional staff in the campground, possibly with input from JAG in the initial phase of field implementation. Riparian buffers may exceed standards of the California Forest Practice Rules to protect special values at particularly important locations of recreation areas.

3) Cable Corridors should be kept as narrow as possible and, if practicable, aligned to minimize visibility. Care must be taken to avoid injuring leave trees at the edge of corridors.

4) Tractor Logging should leave as much vegetation as possible for visual screening from roads and trails. Tractor use should be restricted when soils are moist to avoid soil compaction.

5) Landings and Access Routes should be limited to the minimum size needed consistent with providing safe working areas. Landings (including those from previous logging entries) should be cleaned up and planted unless designated for reuse. All access roads and landings should be decommissioned by covering with slash to limit non-authorized use, stabilize surface soil, and enhance regeneration of native plants. Special care should be taken to avoid conditions conducive to establishment of exotic plants.

6) Logging Debris away from trails and visitor use will be treated using standards within the Forest Practice Rules. Slash abatement may in places exceed the normally-prescribed 50 feet from a road (Management Plan pages 119 and 273) to reduce fire risk or enhance recreation and aesthetic values.

Executive Summary

The Task Force has agreed upon preliminary recommendations regarding policies and their implementation for recreation and education programs, activities and services in the JDSF. The complete recommendations can be reviewed on the pages that follow.

The members of the Task Force provide these recommendations to the JAG so that they may be included in the JAG's report to the appropriate decision makers who have oversight and management responsibility over the Jackson State Demonstration Forest. These recommendations have been developed based upon the experience of the Task Force members both as users (some of whom have used the forest for 20 years or more) of the JDSF and as participants on the JAG Recreation Committee, review of the Recreation Master Plan dated August 1990 and other relevant documents that have been produced over the years.

Resources

- Dedicated funding shall be provided for recreational and educational projects, maintenance and program.
- Establish a private, non-profit organization, e.g., FJF to generate funds and provide support for the educational and recreational uses of the forest.
- Designate an experienced, enthusiastic staff member responsible for education and recreation in the JDSF.

Promotion

- Update maps of JDSF identifying trail types, trail lengths, camping and shooting areas.
- Promote JDSF as a destination for the full range of recreational and educational activities available including horseback riding, mountain bike riding, hiking, shooting, birding, mushrooming and firewood collection.
- Establish a vibrant, interactive, visitor-friendly online presence for the JDSF dedicated to recreational and educational uses of the forest.
- Ensure that information about available resources, recreation, activities, events and educational opportunities is located in areas where the general public can readily access them.
- Provide a physical location for visitors to the forest to learn about what is available.
- Provide an area for demonstrating the use of forest materials by Native Americans and early settlers to visitors.

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- The public should be made aware of educational opportunities in the forest.
- Develop and promote interesting programs to attract visitors to Mendocino County & the JDSF.

Access

- Forest roads built and maintained with recreation users needs addressed.
- JDSF should support, including pursuing legal action, trail right of ways through private property used by the public to access to the Forest for recreation. Funding should be provided to maintain and increase recreational right-of-ways through private property to JDSF.
- Decommissioned roads left with a usable trail tread.
- Improve parking access and designate existing camping and parking areas by intended use, e.g., horseback riders, other campers and recreational users.
- Trailheads should have clear maps of the trail system.
- A description of all trails in system including length, elevation gain, difficulty, points of interest, horse watering spots, and trail educate should also be posted at trailheads.
- Trail junctions should have clear signs that include trail name, length and difficulty.
- A fastest way back to the trailhead sign should also be placed at junctions.
- Reservation and permit fee policies and procedures need to be fully reviewed and revised to improve access to the JDSF for recreation and education.

Maintain Existing Structures, Trails and Facilities

- Maintain and improve the three demonstration trails both for recreational and educational use.
- Install educational signs at appropriate points along the demonstration trails and historical sites.
- Replace missing trail signs and repair existing ones.
- Restore the Little Red Schoolhouse.
- JDSF should check trails for vegetation and erosion problems every spring and fall. Bridges and other structures should be checked yearly and repaired or replaced as necessary.

Trail Building

- Develop a current inventory of trails, building upon the work completed in 2008, with an assessment of their suitability for specific types of trail use and recommendations for modification, relocation and expansion.
- Establish guidelines for trail development.
- Develop a one, two and three-year plan for trail building and maintenance. Designate the appropriate use of each of the proposed trail types, e.g., multiuse, hiking or bicycling only, ADA, etc.
- Describe the preferred and acceptable methods of building trails by type and designated usage.

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- Project the level of effort and costs for the one-, two- and three-year trail building plans.
- Develop a trail maintenance plan with appropriate guidelines for implementation.

Hiking, Biking, Horseback Riding Trails

- Trails developed to connect high use areas inside and outside the recreational corridor as well as to adjacent recreational and residential areas.
- Designate and develop multi-use trailheads.
- Develop horse water on designated trails.
- A stacked loop trail system with easy loops of around 1 mile leading to harder loops of 20 miles or more should be developed from the three staging areas. Since logging activity may close some or all trails in a stacked loop system some loops should be developed nearby as alternatives when trails are closed.
- A wheelchair accessible loop trail should also be available away from multi use loops.
- Trails should be routed to highlight scenic, historic, natural points of interest.
- Connector trails that allow users to travel from one trail system to another, and to camping areas should be available.
- Improve Sherwood Trail, identify and resolve conflicts with adjacent land owners.

Camping

- Camp areas made available outside the “recreational corridor.”
- Group camps made available for use throughout the year.
- Expand and modernize existing camps, including horse camps, car accessible camps and back packing camp sites.

Target Shooting

- Designate and build target-shooting area away from heavily trafficked recreation areas.
- Provide room for adequate parking.
- Ensure that information about is included in all promotional activities for the JDSF.
- Develop operating rules and guidelines and post them in the parking area and range.

Education

- School districts throughout the county, the region and the state will be informed about educational opportunities and programs in the JDSF.
- Existing informational kiosks will be updated and maintained on an annual basis.

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- Additional kiosks and/or bulletin boards should be implemented to provide information about the history of the forest and both educational and recreational opportunities and activities.
- JDSF should reach out to develop strong cooperation between schools and forest personnel to develop outdoor education programs in JDSF.

OHV

At this time the JDSF Recreation Task Force has not yet made a recommendation regarding OHV activities in and access to the JDSF. However such activities are under consideration and a recommendation will be made.

User Survey & Recreation/Education Plan

- See attached document for complete list of guidelines for developing the survey.
- See the attached document for proposed survey questions relative to bicycling.
- The same contractor who is hired to conduct the survey should be used to develop the recreation/education plan. Therefore the RFP should include both the survey & the plan development.