**Southwestern Region of the USDA Forest Service**

**World Forces – WT Version 1**

**1. World Forces**

What circumstances define the context in which the organization exists. The World represents those forces external to the organization that affect its ability to carry out its mission. The Southwestern Region of the USDA Forest Service is surrounded by the world, indicating the dynamic set of forces influencing it.

The following emerging and related world trends are particularly influencing the Southwestern Region’s ability to carry out its land management and public service responsibilities. Each force brings risks to the operations of the Forest Service that need to be recognized, but too can bring opportunities worth considering.

**1.1 Appropriations & Expectations**

**Narrative**

The Forest Service work is guided by expectations and associated allocations by Congress, USDA, and publics that influence Congressional decisions. Allocations to the Forest Service have been relatively flat for the past 6 years1 though expectations tend to increase and shift. A key factor toward being able to meet all the varying expectations becomes more difficult as more and more of the budget allocation has shifted from program to wildfire allocations. Allocations come with expectations, expectations that can vary from year to year, and constraints on how allocations can be spent to meet the numerous programs and needs of the Forest Service.

1Managing for Results-Application & Reports-Budget Status and Work Plan Reports-All Funds FY14-FY20 Analysis.xlsx

**Associated Risks**

The ability for the Forest Service to accomplish all that is needed for National Forest land management is constrained and can lack focus which leads to more of a crisis management, reactive approach. Expectations from varying government officials, non-government organizations, industries, and publics adds to the inability to be more proactive in management of the lands. Costs of the wildfire organization and preparation, though needed, diminish the ability to invest in the other programs and successfully meet expectations in land management.

**Potential Opportunities**

Seek opportunities where flexibility exists to direct capacity toward key priorities. Establish proactively what the priorities and focus can be for each program and unit (not just some) and match the expectations and budget to them. Engage the Washington Office, NGO’s, and government officials (including Congress persons) in development of the paths forward.

**1.2 Global Environmental Change**

**Narrative**

Humanities’ worldwide demand for resources coupled with the economic and technological means to manipulate our environment have led to planetary scale impacts to our global ecosystem over the last century, and our influence and impacts are growing exponentially with time. This is leading to what is being termed the Holocene/Anthropocene Extinction, which may prove to be a new geological epoch.

Anthropogenic alterations to climate, net primary productivity available to other life forms, open space, plant and animal migrations are examples of critical environmental vulnerabilities in the arid southwest, which is home to Region 3 of the Forest Service.

**Associated Risks**

The pace and scale of this global environmental change is unprecedented and leads to significant risks and uncertainty in terms of how best “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations.” The cultural, institutional and legal frameworks the Forest Service operates under are in many cases not agile enough, at present, to adapt to this future that has no historical analog. It will be difficult to determine when doing something is riskier than doing nothing.

**Potential Opportunities**

These challenges offer an excellent opportunity for the Region to leverage our expertise and resources by convening our communities, sister agencies, cooperators and stakeholders to work in a boundaryless fashion towards common goals. National Forests and Grasslands offer the opportunity to provide water for all life, renewable energy and resources for our communities, climate change mitigation for the planet, retention of inherently resilient and connected landscapes, and function as experimental controls and “laboratories” for cutting edge technologies and science aimed at species conservation.

**1.3 Technology**

**Narrative**

The rapid advance of technology is having a profound effect on business operations. With technological advances, come higher customer expectations for both efficiency and sophistication in our mission delivery, compelling a need for updated regulations and policies and proactive strategies.

**Associated Risks**

The rate of change in technology creates the risk of leaving the current workforce behind and being outpaced by the public we serve and other providers. An inability to meet needs, will both erode public trust and affect our ability to retain top talent in the Agency. Inequities in reliable internet service must be addressed so that a broader audience has opportunity to provide feedback and inform our work. Our culture of military-based organization, slow to adoption of change, can-do work ethic and tradition, can lead to an aversion to adopting new technology.

**Potential Opportunities**

Emerging technologies (e.g., in social media, drones, LiDAR) offer new ways to collect, manage, and employee information that improves communication and trust with employees and the public, maximizes efficiencies to reduce workforce needs, and improves productivity and morale. The business of managing public lands must evolve to take advantage of advancements that provide quality decision making enabling the Forest Service to be world leaders in natural resource conservation. Technology will allow us to address broadscale issues at the appropriate scale. Customer service will be improved with quicker response times and convenient virtual sales and permit issuance.

**1.4 Changing Relationship with the Natural World**

**Narrative**

Shifting demographics, advances in recreation technology, and a global pandemic have driven measurable and dramatic shifts in the numbers and types of visitors to the outdoors and public lands in particular. Wildfires in the western United States and epic weather events in other parts of the country are diminishing any doubts people may have had about the fragility of nature and our planet and the degree to which we rely upon both, not just for recreation and spiritual renewal, but for survival. Social unrest, including the uprising at Standing Rock has highlighted the racial injustices built into a colonial approach to land habitation. As the country grapples with its history of racial and social injustice, indigenous wisdom is coming to the forefront and shifting the way many view the inherent value of the earth. A perception that land is only valuable for what can be extracted from it is shifting toward an understanding that we need to sustain the function and of intact ecosystems.

**Associated Risk**

Many of our guiding regulations and policies, including our appropriation framework are at odds with a shift away from a focus on what is *taken* from the land. Our current systems and structures do not adequately support us in being proactive in stewarding our landscapes in a way that recognizes that changing way that people are experiencing them.

Extractive industry and its associated lobby may prove to be at odds with a public beginning to realize the limits and climate effects of fossil fuels and the loss of carbon sinks vast forests provide.

**Potential Opportunities**

While our corporate systems may be archaic and cumbersome, we have partners who are ready to help us move forward in creative ways. Our own bureaucratic limitations serve as an invitation for partners to step up and work with us toward common goals.