

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision
Awareness Meeting
October 14, 2014
Alamosa, CO
5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Meeting Summary**

Attendees

Forest Plan Revision Team

- *US Forest Service*: Mike Blakeman, Adam Mendonca
- *National Forest Foundation*: Emily Olsen, Marcus Selig
- *Peak Facilitation*: Kristin Barker, Heather Bergman

19 members of the public were also present.

Meeting Overview

Members of the public attended this kickoff Awareness Meeting to learn about and participate in the upcoming Forest Plan revision for the Rio Grande National Forest. The purpose of the meeting was twofold: 1) to inform meeting participants about the Forest Plan and upcoming revision process, and 2) to learn how community members use and value the forest, and about their key goals for the planning process.

Opening Remarks

Attendees heard two brief opening remarks:

- Peak Facilitation Group President Heather Bergman introduced herself as the meeting facilitator and gave an overview of what to expect from this and future meetings.
- Adam Mendonca, Acting Forest Supervisor of the Rio Grande National Forest, explained that public participation is vital to the Forest Plan revision process, particularly under the new 2012 planning rule.

Presentations

Two presenters spoke for ten minutes each about the Forest Plan and revision process.

Forest Plan and Revision

Adam Mendonca, Acting Forest Supervisor, explained that the Forest Plan provides a high-level guide for all decisions and activities on the Rio Grande National Forest. All projects on the forest must follow the guidelines of the Forest Plan, which is revised every 15 years and amended as needed. USFS revised the key requirements of the Forest Plan in 2012 to include aspects of ecological and biological health, resource management, and sustainable forest use. [View the presentation slides at the RGNF Plan Revision website.](#)

USFS encourages members of the public to participate throughout the Forest Plan revision process, which consists of the following five steps:

Plan Revision Step	Opportunity for Public Involvement	Associated USFS Document(s)	Timeline for Completion
Assess current and possible conditions	Participate in assessment meetings	Assessment report	Summer 2015
Propose plan changes	Participate in planning meetings	Need For Change report	Fall 2015
National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process	Comment on published Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Forest Plan draft(s)	Progressive drafts of Forest Plan and EIS, culminating in Final EIS	
Address objections and make decisions	Voice objections during 60-day objection period (if desired)	Record of Decision	2017
Monitor process and revise if necessary	Ongoing		

Questions and Answers

- *Why aren't resources like timber and grazing included in the sustainability section of the key requirements?* We do not currently have a set requirement for timber harvest sustainability, because first we have to determine suitability. Suitability must be sustainable.

Rio Grande National Forest Planning Process

Heather Bergman, President of Peak Facilitation Group, detailed the overall plan revision process and its need for meaningful public participation. [View the presentation slides at the RGNF Plan Revision website.](#) Over the next year, USFS and the National Forest Foundation will host a series of public meetings to discuss specific forest management issues and areas of concern within the Rio Grande National Forest. Public participation at these meetings will help determine the scope of the planning process and will identify the key needs, values, and interests of stakeholders to be addressed in the Forest Plan. Additionally, local groups and organizations are encouraged to co-host meetings focusing on their issues of interest. In order to accomplish its goal of engaging the public frequently in a meaningful and transparent way, USFS brought in the National Forest Foundation and Peak Facilitation Group to ensure that meaningful public participation occurs throughout the planning process.

A new interactive website allows members of the public to answer questions, post comments and pictures, and be part of a conversation with community members and local leaders about the Rio Grande National Forest and the plan revision process: <http://riograndeplanning.mindmixer.com/>

Questions and Answers

- *How will you assess input from beyond the San Luis Valley? Will you solicit input from tourists who also use the forest?* As a federal agency managing public land owned by all Americans, we are required to reach as far and wide as possible when soliciting public input. We will be holding public meetings over the next 3 years, and visitors are always welcomed and encouraged to attend meetings. We're also working with the National Forest Foundation

to develop a process that would allow us to hold a subset of meetings in places like Denver, which may be more accessible to people outside the valley.

- *I know other parts of the state have focused groups, like snowmobiling enthusiast groups. Do any focused groups exist locally? Are they invited to these public meetings?* Yes, representatives of local groups have already attended some of our awareness meetings. We're using radio announcements, newspaper articles, and e-mail lists to reach a broad audience of groups as well as individual community members. Please let us know if you know of a group or person that would like to be added to our contact list, and please share any additional ideas you have to help us reach out to more people.

Electronic Polling

Participants answered ten electronic polling questions identifying how individuals and their communities use and value the forest. Polling results can be found at the end of this summary.

Special Notes

- The "Other" responses on question 2 (What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?) were for fishing and cell towers.
- The "Other" response on question 10 (Which of these issues concerns you regarding the Rio Grande National Forest plan revision?) was for improving habitat, especially for species of concern.

Small Group Discussions

Participants broke into three groups to discuss questions about the Rio Grande National Forest and the plan revision process. An overview of key themes from this meeting follows; a summation of the discussions from all awareness meetings (held in Antonito, South Fork, Alamosa, and Saguache) [is available online](#).

1. How and where do you use the Rio Grande National Forest?

Common Themes: All groups use the forest for hunting, fishing, hiking, and harvesting wood. Both recreational and professional uses were noted.

Additional Responses: Uses of the Forest

Rafting, hiking, horseback riding, camping, four-wheeling, ATV riding, cross-country and downhill skiing, snowmobiling, boating, nature viewing, leisure driving, traveling through to get to another place, meditating, mushrooming, painting, photography, archaeology, history, livestock grazing, logging/sawmill operations, water supply appreciation

Additional Responses: Locations of Forest Use

Wilderness areas, South San Juans, South Fork, Rock Creek, Conejos, areas around Crestone and Montrose

2. *What roles and contributions does the Rio Grande National Forest make to this community?*

Common Themes: Economic gains, recreational opportunities, and water supply were mentioned by every group.

Additional Responses: Roles and Contributions of the Forest

- *Economics:* Timber/wood products, water supply for recreational and agricultural uses, employment opportunities, livestock grazing, tourism, recreation
- *Ecosystem services:* Clean water, biodiversity
- *Social and cultural benefits:* Historical appreciation, recreation, solitude, beauty, scenic views, open space, wild landscapes, place to get away from civilization, opportunity for observing wildlife and wild landscapes
- *Land protection/stewardship/supervision*

3. *What are things in the current plan or how the forest is currently managed that you would like to see changed in the plan revision?*

Common Themes: All groups noted a need to appropriately manage beetle kill. Many also mentioned the importance of better trail maintenance and increased grazing management.

Additional Responses: Proposals for Change in the Plan Revision

- *Public communication*
 - Inform public about when and why road and trail closures occur
 - Increase educational outreach
- *Forest health*
 - Develop beetle kill plan to address safety and management issues; actively pursue/expand use of beetle kill trees
 - Preserve wildlife corridors
- *Travel management*
 - Enforce prohibition of ATV usage on roads and open areas
 - Change roadless areas
 - Open road closures
 - Address ATV trail erosion and expansion (i.e., single-track to double-track)
- *Grazing management*
 - Minimize riparian grazing
 - Enforce annual grazing permittee requirements, particularly with respect to non-compliance and overgrazing violations
- *Miscellaneous*
 - Strongly increase trail maintenance efforts
 - Address lack of Forest Service resources
 - Provide exemptions for structure maintenance and equipment in wilderness

4. *What concerns do you have about the forest plan revision process?*

Common Themes: Common concerns included public input not actually being utilized in the final plan and the process in general taking too long.

Additional Responses: Concerns about the Forest Plan Revision

- Needs to maintain momentum
- Electronic survey questions asked during the meeting will be weighted too strongly and polling process was imperfect (some issues left out (e.g., fishing), others inappropriately combined (e.g., firewood/timber))

5. *If you could only tell the Forest Service one thing about the forest, how you interact with the forest, and/or the plan revision process, what would it be?*

Common Concerns: Each group mentioned different talking points, including topics ranging from maintaining current multiple uses, protecting riparian areas, and expediting dead timber salvage.

Additional Responses

- Retire grazing permits on wilderness
- Speed up the NEPA process
- Keep roadless areas roadless
- Do not allow land swaps to diminish the forest

Additional Comments and Perspectives

In addition to the common themes among participants and between groups that are outlined above, multiple unique comments and perspectives emerged from the small group discussions, large group discussion, and on comment cards provided at the meeting. These are listed below.

- Road closures are a huge concern, especially seasonal closures. The public needs consistent information about open trails and roads.
- Encourage successful big game harvest by keeping trails and roads open.
- Multiple use should be the overarching principle.
- Totally against new bypass flows and groundwater management by USFS in forest.
- Rio Grande County has had significant past and future calls for cell towers and telecommunication towers. How can the Forest Service designate areas for this type of use (i.e., use 1041 powers) to lessen the impact near state highways and/or high density residential areas?

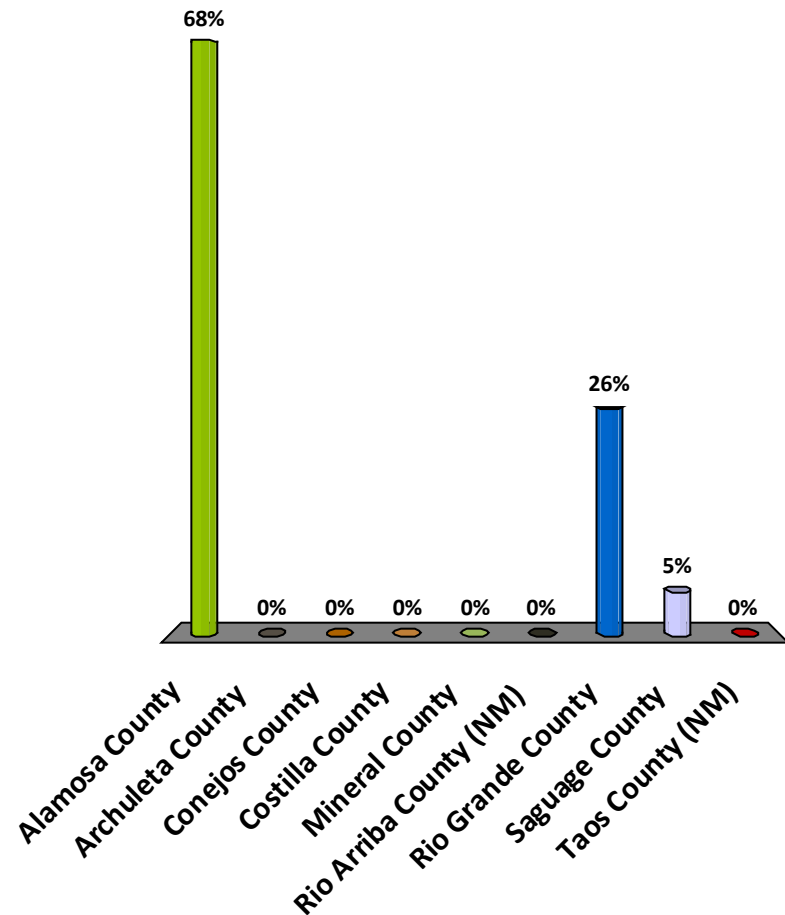


Rio Grande National Forest Plan Revision

Community Awareness Meeting
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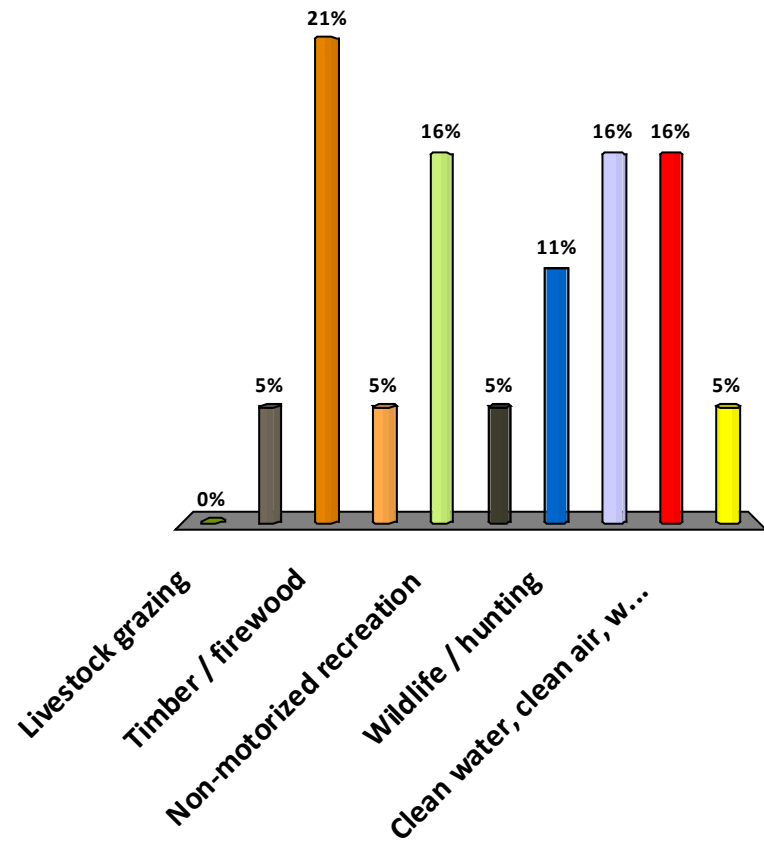
1. Where do you live?

- A. Alamosa County
- B. Archuleta County
- C. Conejos County
- D. Costilla County
- E. Mineral County
- F. Rio Arriba County (NM)
- G. Rio Grande County
- H. Saguache County
- I. Taos County (NM)



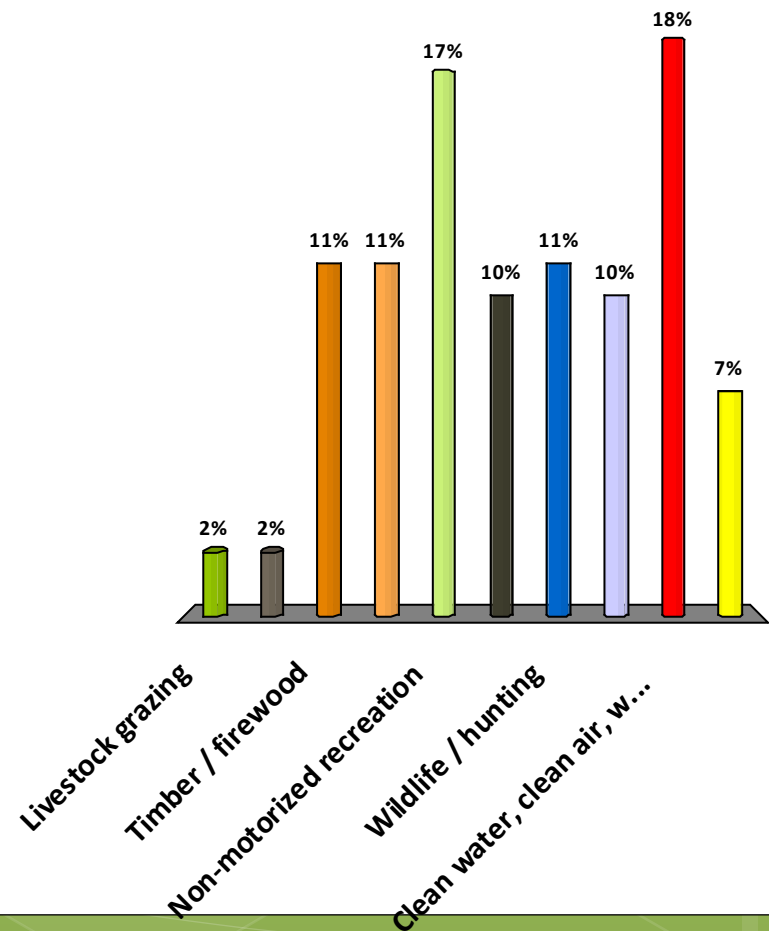
2. What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
- I. Clean water, clean air, water supply
- J. Other



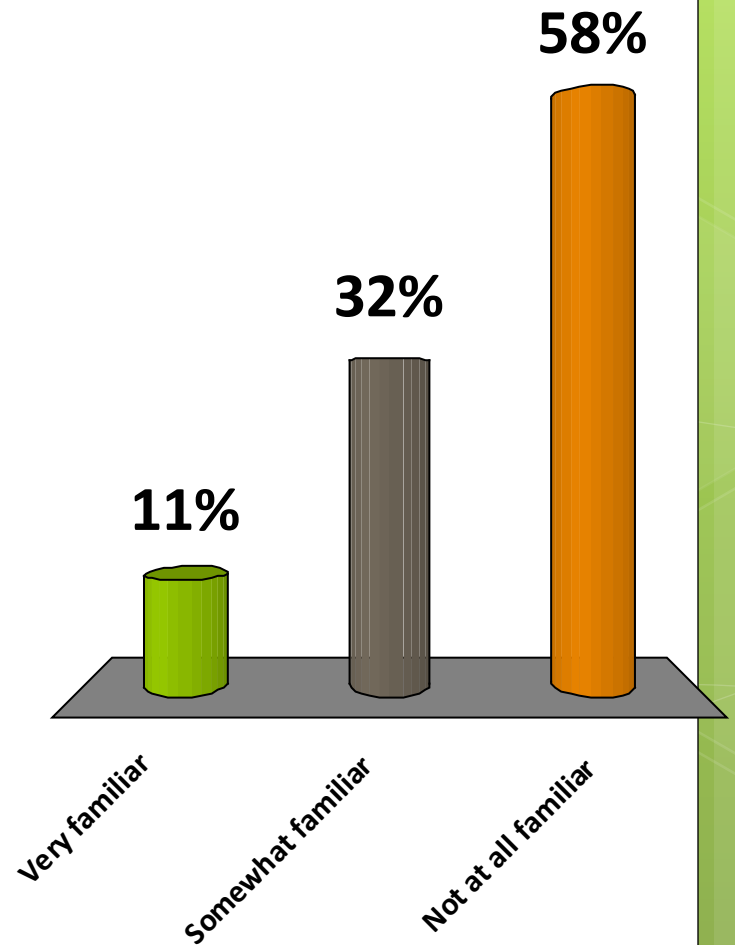
3. Which of the following are your **TOP 3** interests in the Rio Grande National Forest.

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
- I. Clean water, clean air, water supply
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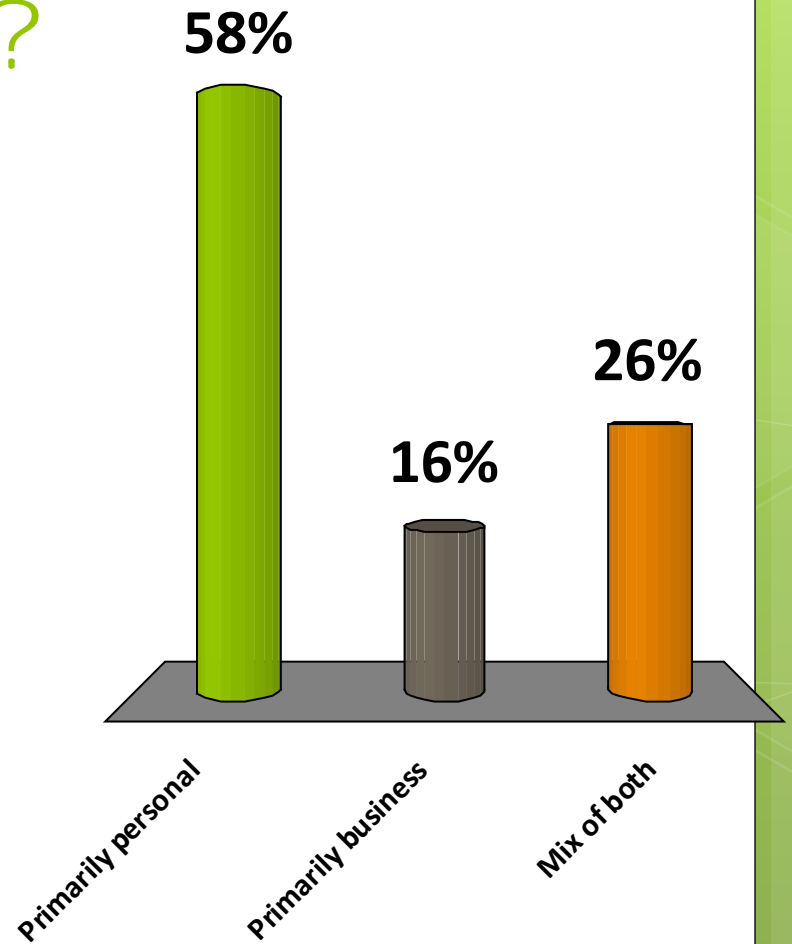
4. How familiar are you with the current Rio Grande National Forest Plan?

- A. Very familiar
- B. Somewhat familiar
- C. Not at all familiar



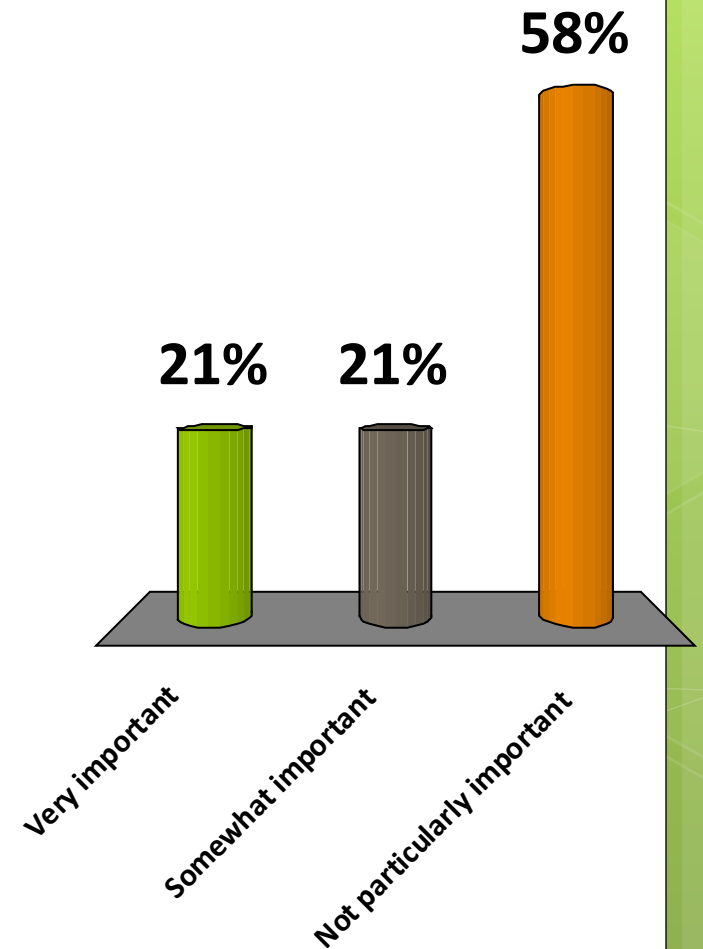
5. Do you use the Rio Grande National Forest primarily for personal or business purposes?

- A. Primarily personal
- B. Primarily business
- C. Mix of both



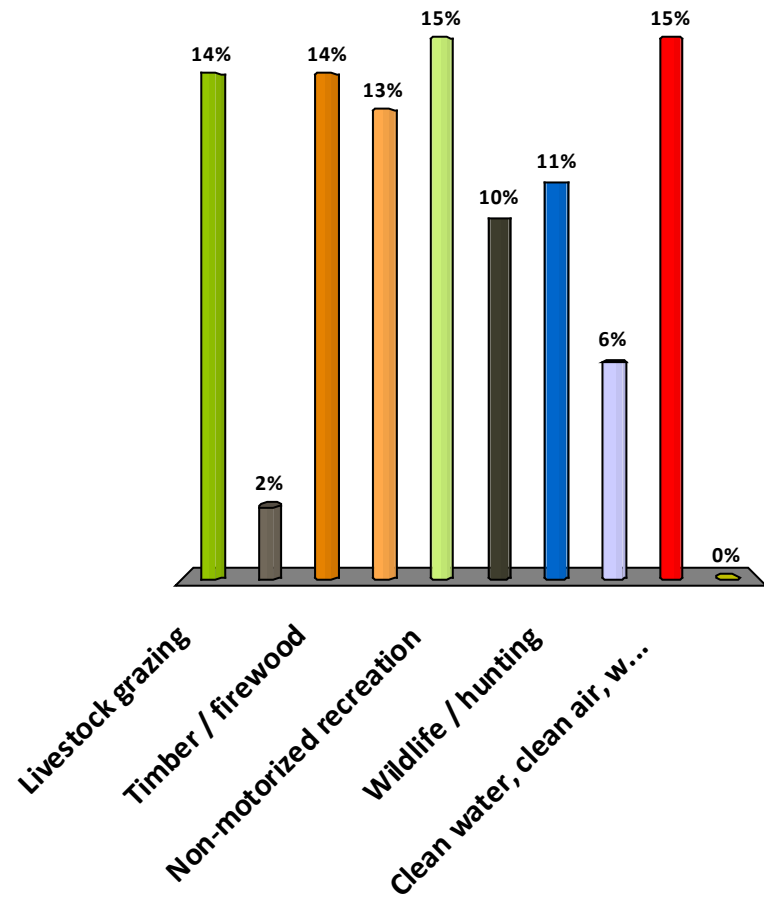
6. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your ability to make a living?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



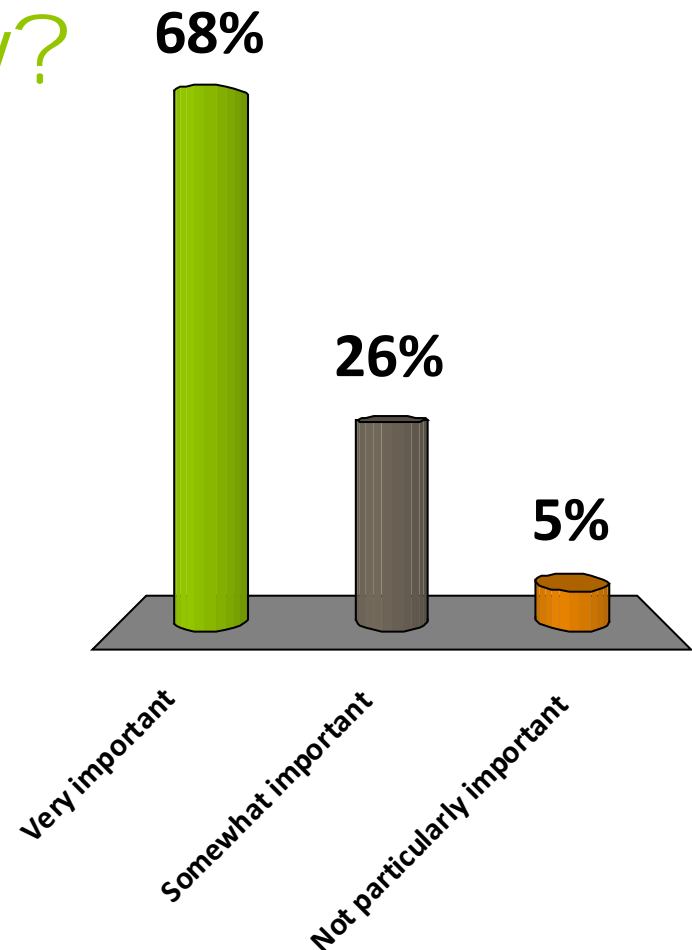
7. What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- A. Livestock grazing
- B. Energy / minerals
- C. Timber / firewood
- D. Motorized recreation
- E. Non-motorized recreation
- F. Camping
- G. Wildlife / hunting
- H. Wilderness
- I. Clean water, clean air, water supply
- J. Other



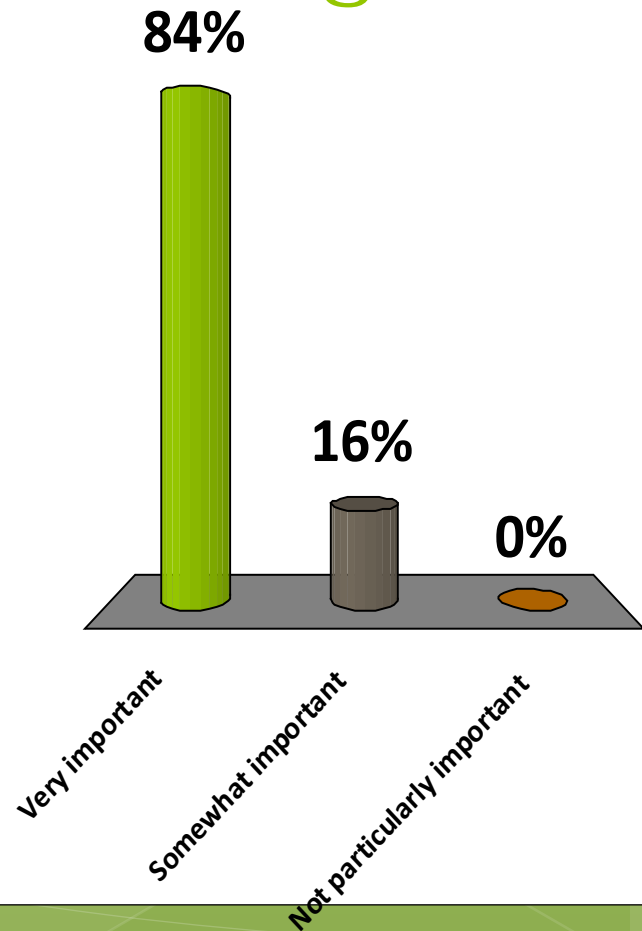
8. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's economic prosperity?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



9. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's social and cultural well-being?

- A. Very important
- B. Somewhat important
- C. Not particularly important



10. Which of these issues concerns you regarding the Rio Grande National Forest plan revision?

- A. Maintaining and building trust with stakeholders
- B. Maintaining multiple uses
- C. Addressing beetle kill impacts
- D. Wildfire preparation
- E. Maintaining forest health
- F. Protecting water supplies
- G. Ensuring developed and undeveloped recreation
- H. Other

