

Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision
Awareness Meeting
October 14, 2014
Alamosa, CO
7:00 pm - 9:00 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

8 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

- *What’s a disturbance regime?* A disturbance regime has to do with all the states of an ecosystem and the factors that can affect those states. For example, a beetle kill forest should be able to attain a mature, old-growth state, but the disturbance by the beetles has changed the timing of when the forest can achieve that state.
- *You mentioned that the plan deals with “Special Areas” – what are they? Is the Wheeler Geologic Area one?* Yes. Roadless areas and wilderness are also Special Areas. We already have Special Areas designated in the current plan, but we can also define new ones.

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

- *Are these going to be the final public meetings for this part of the revision process for 2014?* We haven't actually started the revision process yet – right now we're just getting the word out and getting some initial public input. These awareness meetings are our first public meetings. We have 35 total meetings planned for this fiscal year. It's possible that we won't have any more public meetings in 2014, and it's possible that we'll have many more. That's why we're currently getting your feedback about how to structure the public participation process into the future.
- *I already went to the [website](#) and noticed that there are only a certain amount of days left to comment. Is this our last chance to provide feedback on the site?* No. We will change questions on the website at least every 8 weeks. Questions posted right now are similar to those we're asking at these kickoff meetings. This website is not the only avenue for participation; it's just an additional option. You can also participate at meetings or get in touch with us directly.
 - *So how will we know when new questions are posted on the site?* As long as you signed in when you came in or [registered on the website](#), we'll e-mail you when we update the site.

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

- One attendee could not answer question 1 (Where do you live?), because Larimer County was not included as an option.
- Nobody chose to verbally identify their "Other" responses on question 2 (What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?).
- The "Other" responses on question 3 (Which of the following are your TOP 3 interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?) were for fishing and bird watching.
- The "Other" response on question 7 (What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?) was for quietude.
- Nobody chose to verbally identify their "Other" response on question 10 (Which of these issues concerns you regarding the Rio Grande National Forest plan revision?).
- Participants noted that some response options were inappropriately combined (e.g., firewood and timber), while others were missing entirely (e.g., fishing). Kickoff team members noted that these options were not considered an exhaustive or perfect list; the options were developed as a starting point to identify key uses and interests based on preliminary public feedback.

Small Group Discussions

Participants worked as a group 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: Participants primarily mentioned non-motorized recreational uses of the forest, along with some food gathering (seeds, berries, and mushrooms).

Additional Responses: Uses of the Forest

Fishing, bird watching, hiking, observing fall colors, camping, backpacking, cross-country and downhill skiing, hunting, mushroom and berry gathering, firewood gathering, photography, wildlife watching, snowmobiling, sightseeing, Christmas tree cutting, seed harvesting, quietude

Additional Responses: Locations of Forest Use

None specified

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

Common Themes: The group noted economic (timber, grazing, and tourism), ecological (clean air, water, and food), and mental health benefits.

Additional Responses: Roles and Contributions of the Forest

- *Ecosystem services:* Clean air, watershed protection
- *Economics:* Direct community funding, tourism/visitation dollars, livestock grazing, timber harvesting
- *Life sustenance:* Food harvesting, firewood collecting
- *Social and cultural benefits:* Positive mental health

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: Participants mentioned the importance of communication and cooperation with the public and other agencies. They also wish to see a stronger emphasis on forest health and management.

Additional Responses: Proposals for Change in the Plan Revision

- Ecological integrity should take precedence over multiple use
- Coordinate partnerships to improve monitoring
- Address overgrazing where it occurs
- Review roadless area boundaries
- Improve public communication, especially regarding campground and road closures

4. *What concerns do you have about the Forest Plan revision process?*

Common Themes: The group expressed concerns about reaching underrepresented groups and small communities (e.g., Center, Capulin, Costilla County), overreliance on technology to gather public feedback, and insufficient time to complete the assessment portion of the revision process.

Additional Responses: Concerns about the Forest Plan Revision

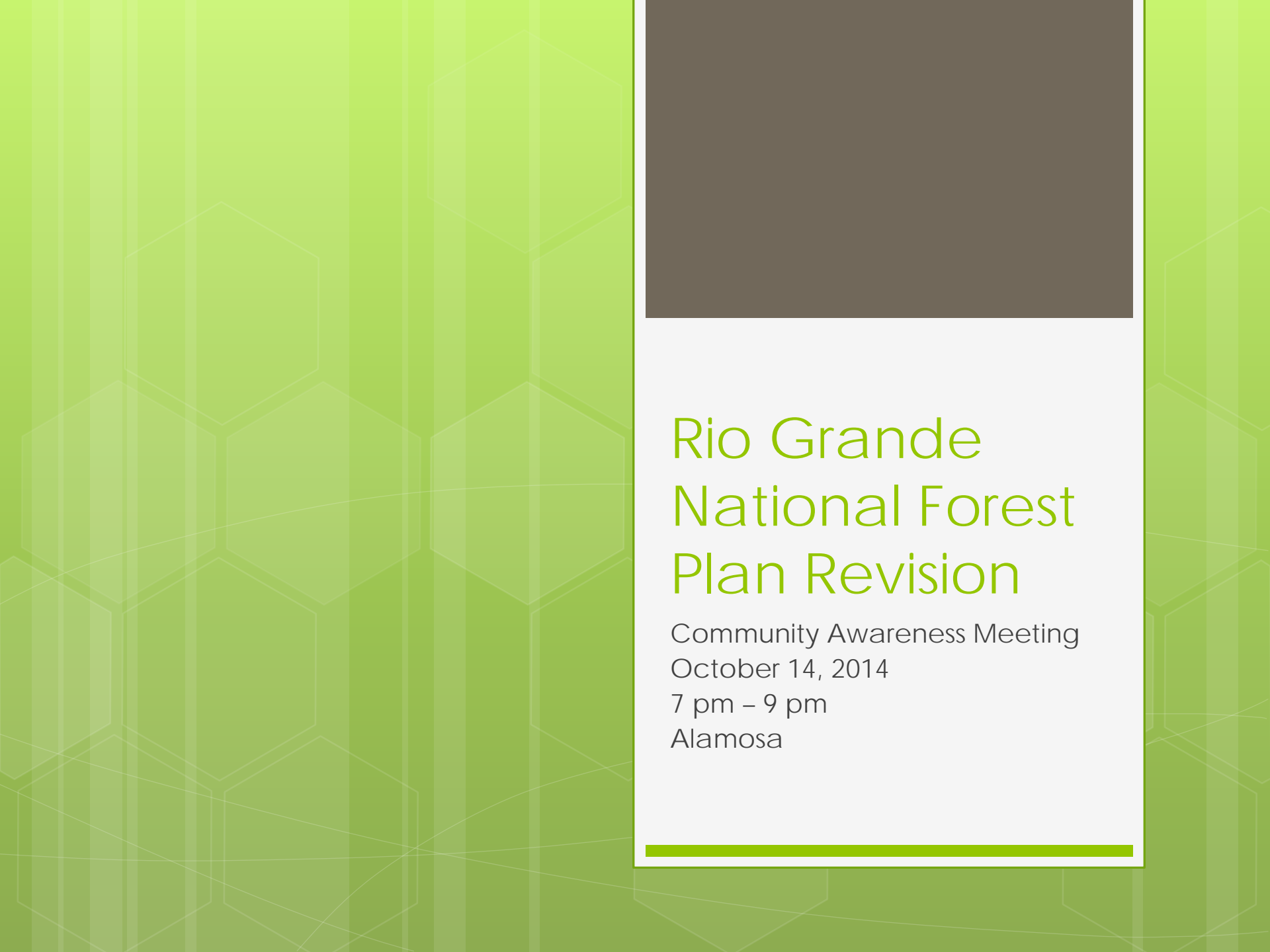
None in addition to those noted above

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: Participants noted a need for improved public relations and ecological integrity.

Additional Responses

Treat the forest as if you're going to stay.

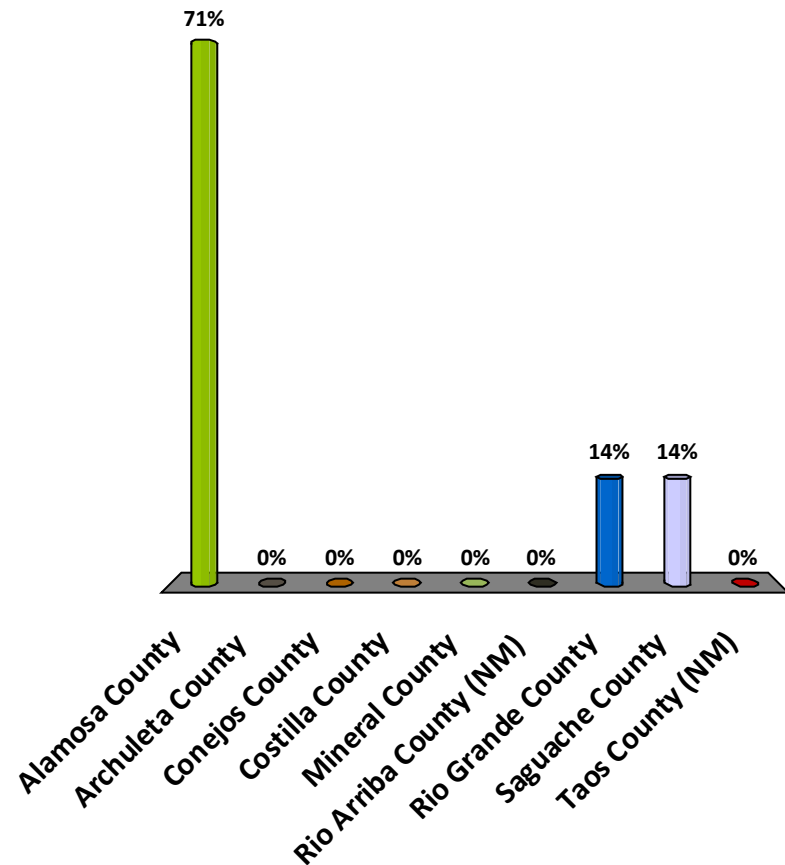


Rio Grande National Forest Plan Revision

Community Awareness Meeting
October 14, 2014
7 pm – 9 pm
Alamosa

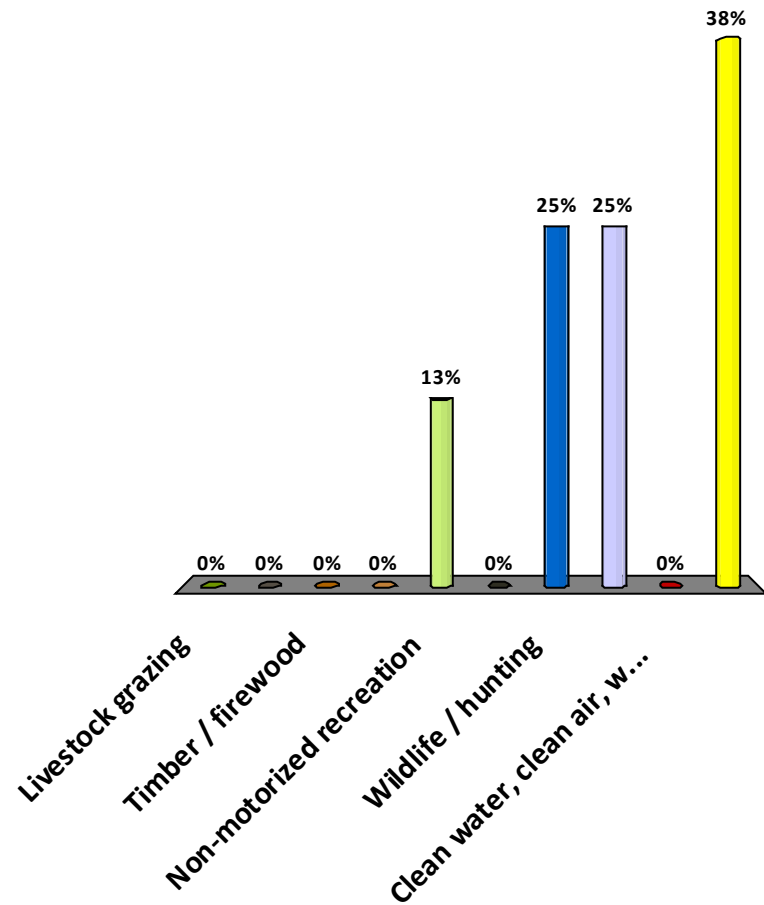
1. Where do you live?

- 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)



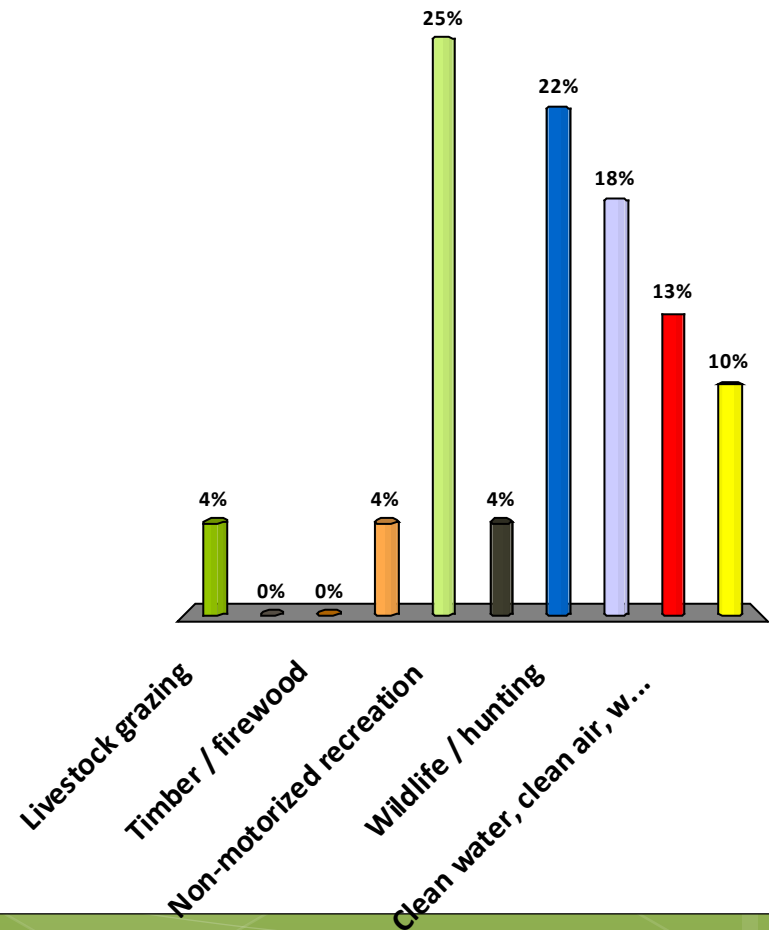
2. What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



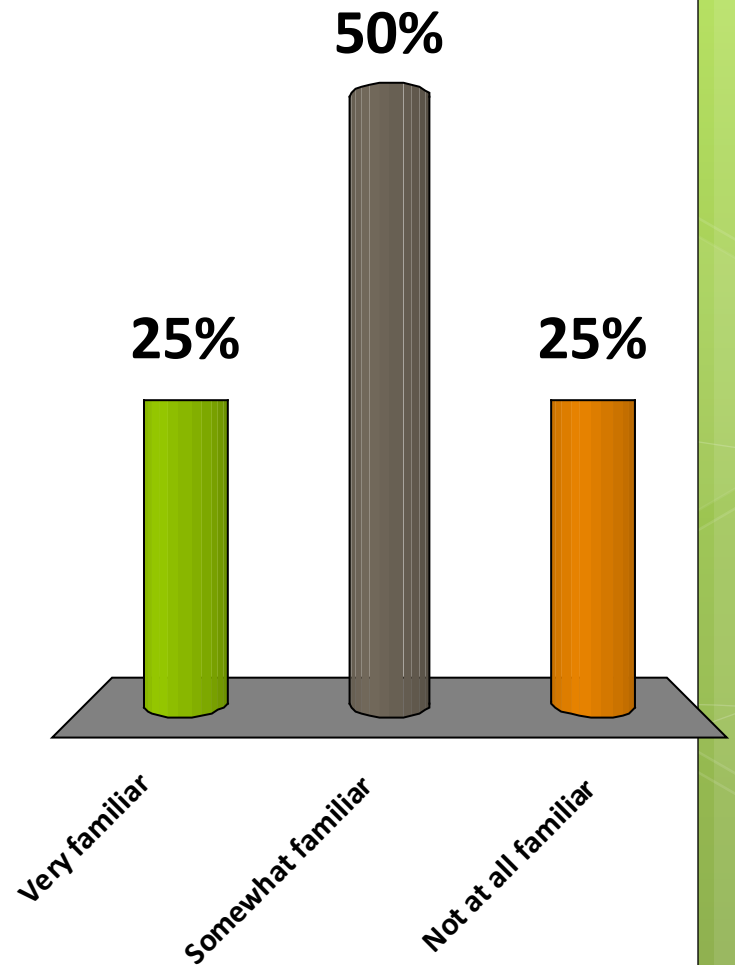
3. Which of the following are your **TOP 3** interests in the Rio Grande National Forest.

- 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
- J. Other



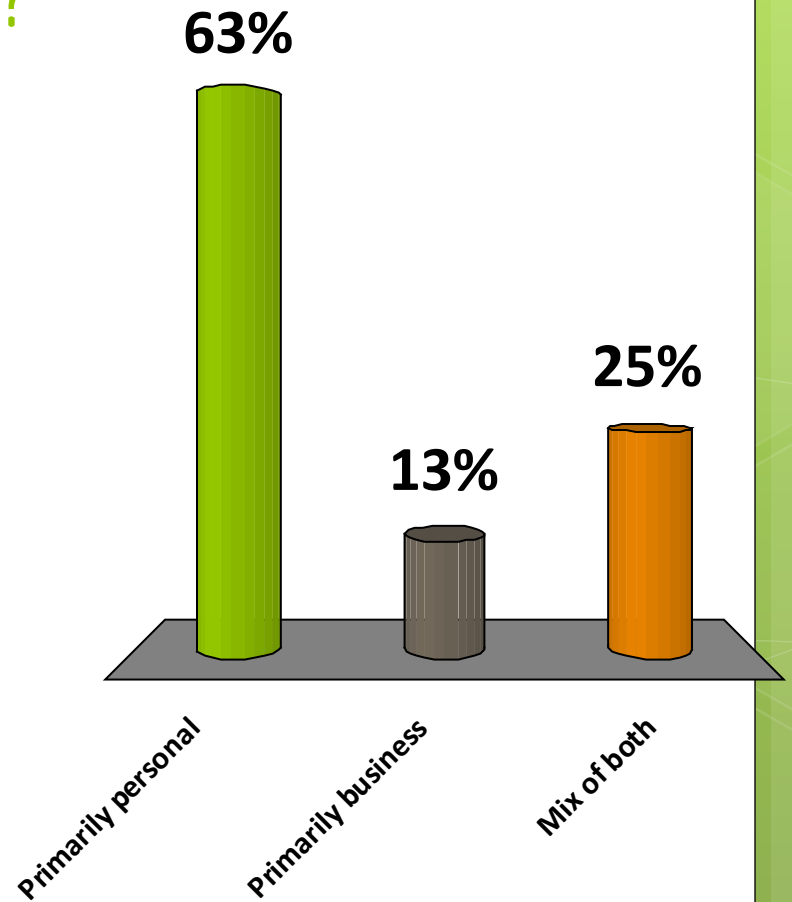
4. How familiar are you with the current Rio Grande National Forest Plan?

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



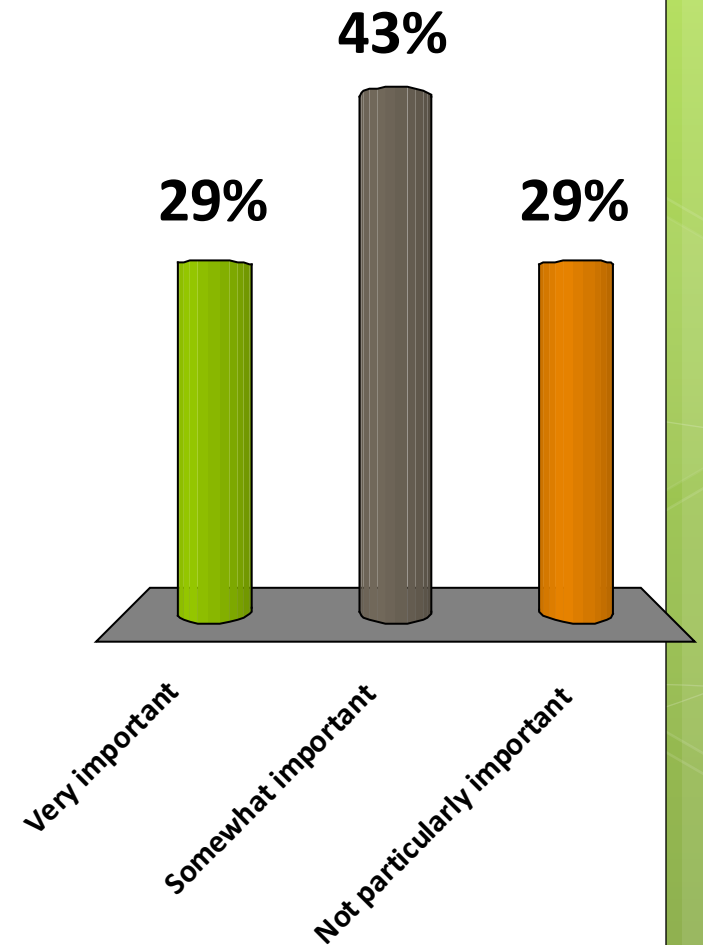
5. Do you use the Rio Grande National Forest primarily for personal or business purposes?

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



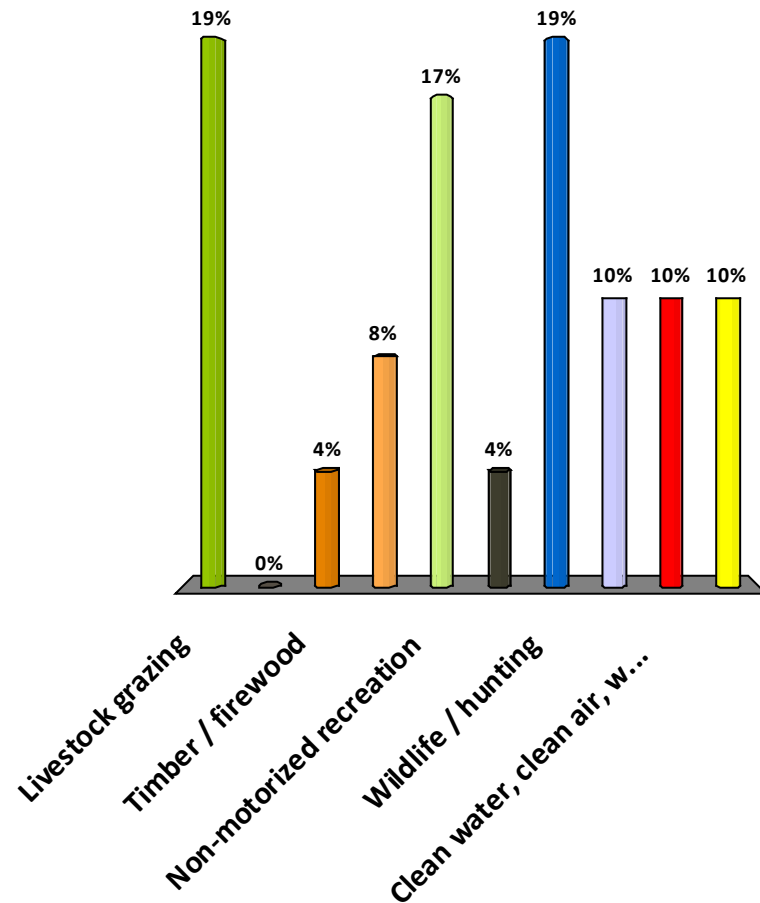
6. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your ability to make a living?

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



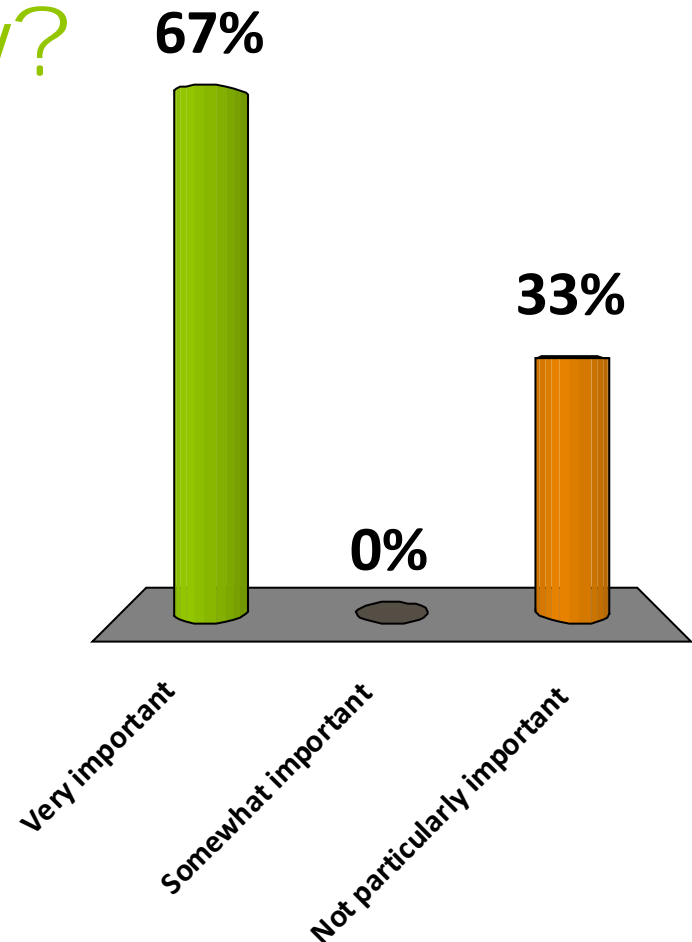
7. What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



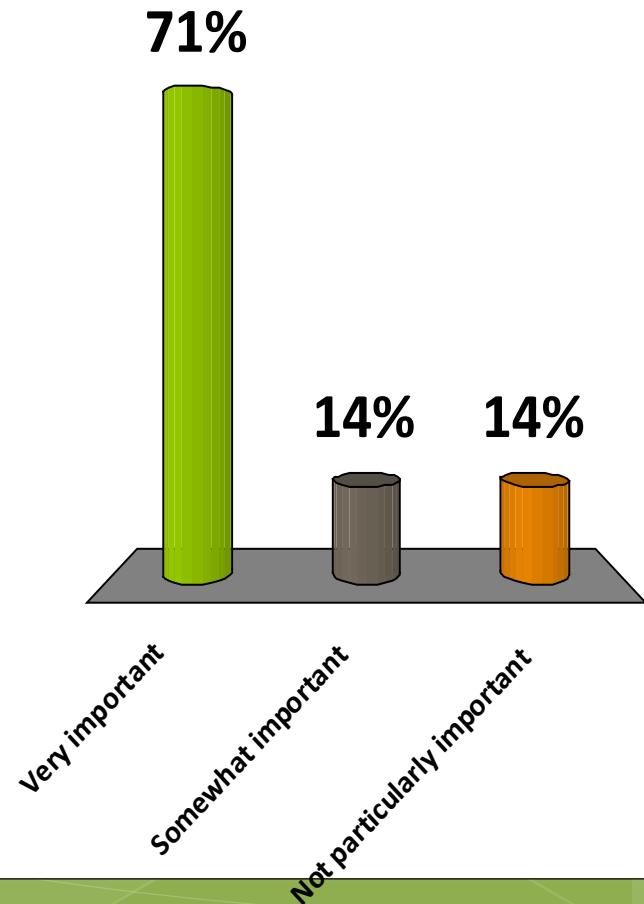
8. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's economic prosperity?

- 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

