

**Rio Grande NF Forest Plan Revision
Awareness Meeting
October 15, 2014
Saguache, CO
5:00 pm - 7:00 pm
Meeting Summary**

Attendees

Forest Plan Revision Team

- *US Forest Service*: Mike Blakeman, Adam Mendonca, Jim Pitts
- *Peak Facilitation*: Kristin Barker, Heather Bergman

15 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.
- Local District Ranger Jim Pitts explained the Forest Plan as a contract between the owners of the forest (the public) and the stewards of the forest (the Forest Service). The process of revising this contract will take time, but persistence, patience, and compromise will lead to success. Mr. Pitts invited participants to come to any local Forest Service office and share their input about the Forest Plan and the revision process.

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

- *Does monitoring fall under the plan requirement of sustainability? How do you know you'll have enough money to monitor?* Adaptive management a more common practice for us now. We set up what we believe to be a sustainable management plan, and then we monitor whether what we've set up really is sustainable. The life of the plan is long, so monitoring allows us to assess whether we're actually achieving our desired conditions.
- *In 20 years will there still be budget for monitoring?* I can't answer that for certain, but we are required to monitor throughout the life of the plan, so we assume the budget will take that requirement into account.
- *Is there still an opportunity for litigation if we don't agree with this new objection process?* Yes. If you choose to object in the new objection process, your objection would be against our Record of Decision document. If we're unable to come to an agreement or make a compromise in regard to that objection, there is still a lawsuit option at the end of the process. We're striving to have as many people as possible at the table with us right now and throughout the revision process so we can come to agreements without the need for litigation.
- *How do you qualify to have standing to object or sue?* Your first opportunity to qualify comes during the initial scoping period. We do a year of assessment and then kick off the NEPA phase with a scoping period. You must comment on the scoping document to have legal standing in the future. The next opportunity is during the objection period – you must make a comment or an objection. If you do not participate in either of those opportunities, you lose your legal standing to sue. I've also seen judges dismiss lawsuits based on the fact that the person did not participate in the early assessment. We never know what judges will decide in the future, so I recommend remaining involved early and often.

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

- No questions were asked.

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

- Two attendees were unable to answer question 1 (Where do you live?), because Montrose and Chaffee Counties were not included as response options.
- The “Other” response on question 2 (What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?) was from a participant who did not wish to be pinned down to just one interest.
- 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?)

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 gathering firewood and timber; many respondents also noted recreational opportunities. Saguache County was the most commonly mentioned location of use.

Additional Responses: Uses of the Forest

Livestock grazing, , small scale timber use, utilizing water supplies, enjoying views, fishing, hiking, wildlife watching, skiing, backpacking, hunting, guiding, looking after the beavers, general recreation

Additional Responses: Locations of Forest Use

Gunnison County, Rio Grande headwaters, Sangre de Cristo mountains

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

Common Themes: Recreational and economic contributions were mentioned by every group. Groups also stated that the community benefits from the water supplied by the forest.

Additional Responses: Roles and Contributions of the Forest

- *Economics:* Timber, tourism, livestock forage and grazing, agriculture
- *Recreation:* Climbers (especially in the Sangre de Cristo mountains), motorized and non-motorized recreation
- *Social and cultural benefits:* Sense of personal community, solitude, context of wilderness, encouragement of land stewardship
- *Ecosystem services:* Clean water
- *Life sustenance:* Food, hunting

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: Every group noted the importance of better weed control; most respondents also mentioned adjusting timber harvest and/or fire management to enhance forest health.

Additional Responses: Proposals for Change in the Plan Revision

- *Forest health*
 - Harvest less live timber, or adjust timber harvest to fit current conditions.
 - Expedite salvage of beetle kill.
 - Improve noxious weed control.
 - Reduce wildfire hazards to protect existing regeneration, especially live regeneration within apparently dead stands.
 - Use better silviculture to create more resilient future forests (reduce unhealthy stand density; possibly insulate remaining live stands).
- *Communication*
 - Coordinate with other agencies (FWS, NPS, BLM) and neighboring National Forests, especially those currently undergoing similar planning processes.
 - Help the public understand how logging can help future forest health.
- *Management and monitoring*
 - Manage recreation more heavily, particularly regarding spreading noxious weeds.
 - Use more adaptive management.
 - Increase resources and staff for monitoring results of USFS actions (e.g., grazing management, weed control).

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

Common Themes: The most common concerns revolved around undue influence of non-local input and special groups, as well as a lack of plan implementation and follow-through.

Additional Responses: Concerns about the Forest Plan Revision

- The plan needs to include more grazing rules.
- Make the plan understandable to the public.
- Balance economic interests; do not focus only on extraction.
- The process takes too long.

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: All groups noted issues related to forest health, although a wide variety of other topics were mentioned as well.

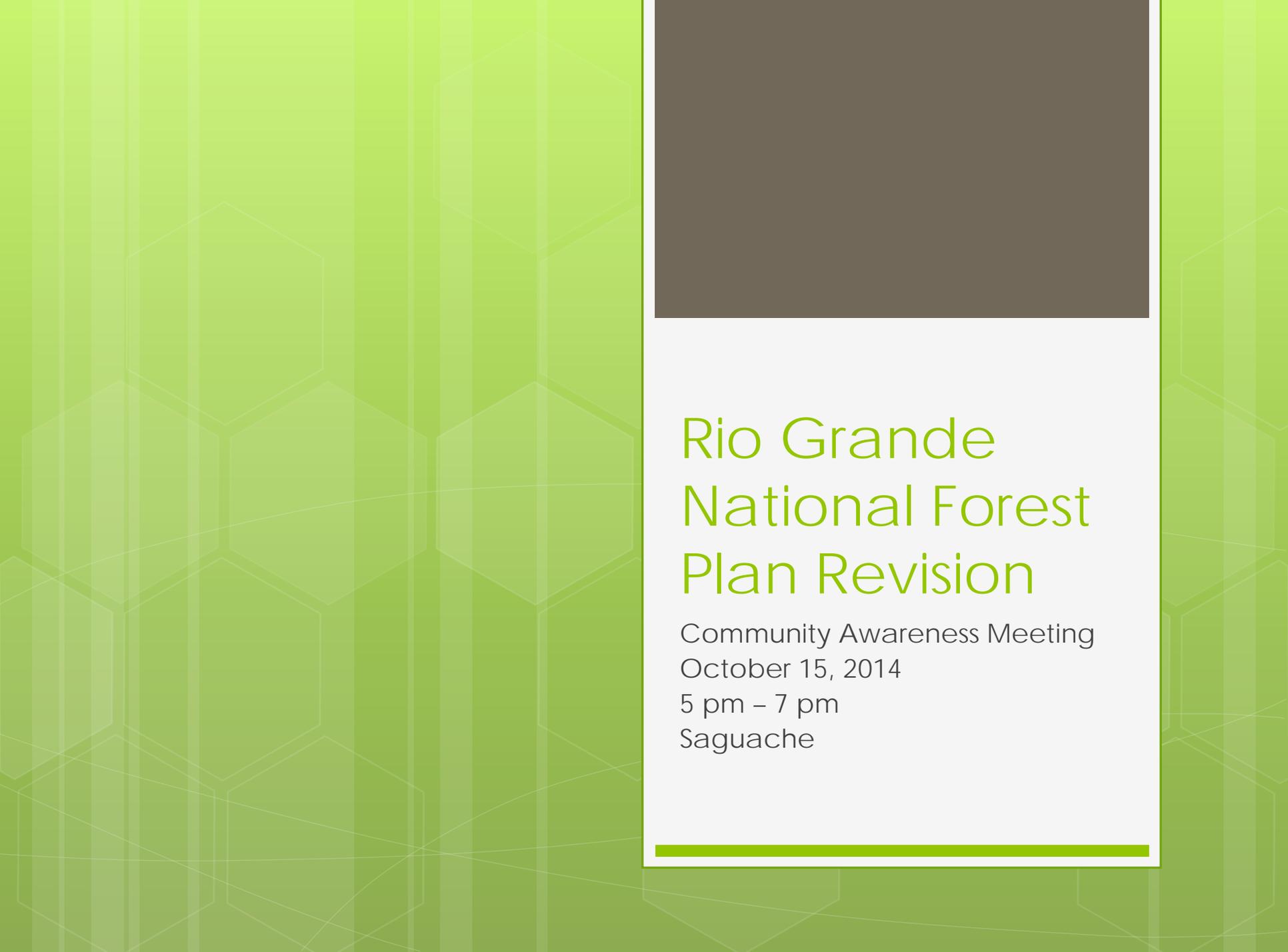
Additional Responses

- Need better coordination in forest
- Increase ability for local districts to make decisions
- Compare hazards and benefits of grazed and ungrazed lands
- Maintain water resources
- Improve recreation management
- Focus on ecosystem sustainability and ecological integrity
- Offer the public opportunities to work on forest sustainability
- Think outside the box to expedite fuel reduction
- Use private industry as the most economic tool
- More handicapped access to forest trails and roads
- Keep your hands off our water - if you want water rights, get in line like the rest of us.

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.

- Maintain science-based sustainable grazing
- Begin sustainable timber harvesting
- Maintain trails for recreation and grazing
- Maintain, preserve, and expand backcountry and wilderness designations
- Backcountry hunting, fishing, and recreation are important to us
- Follow through with new planning; don't overextend available funding; be realistic.
- Maintain important access for hunters and anglers
- Balance nonconsumptive and consumptive use
- Help support sustainable long-term local economies (using hunting, fishing, and/or recreation)

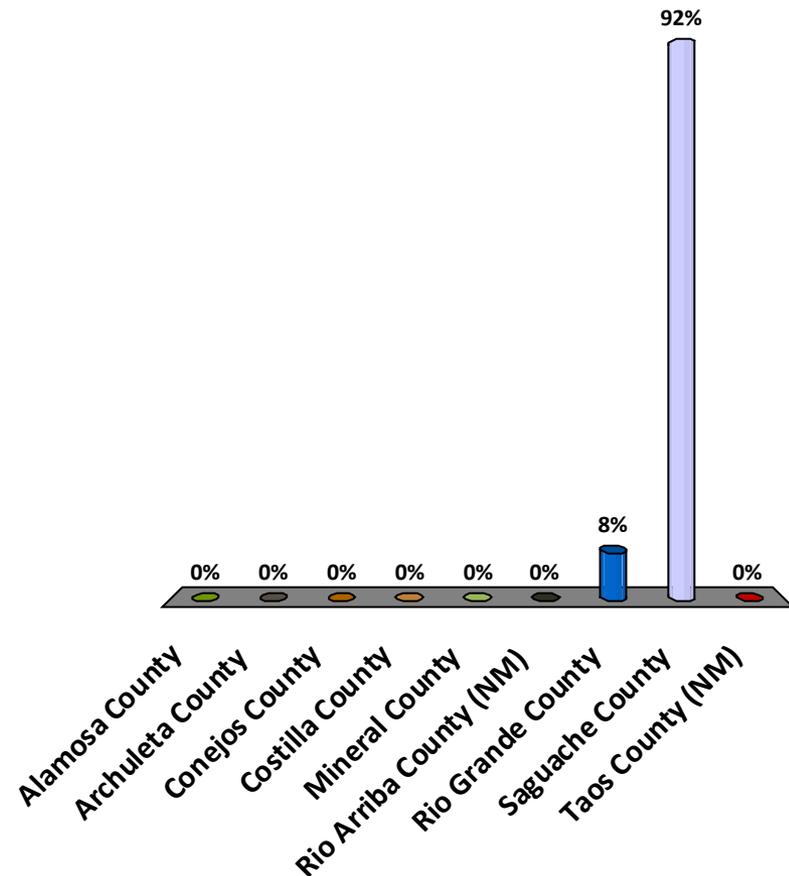


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Community Awareness Meeting
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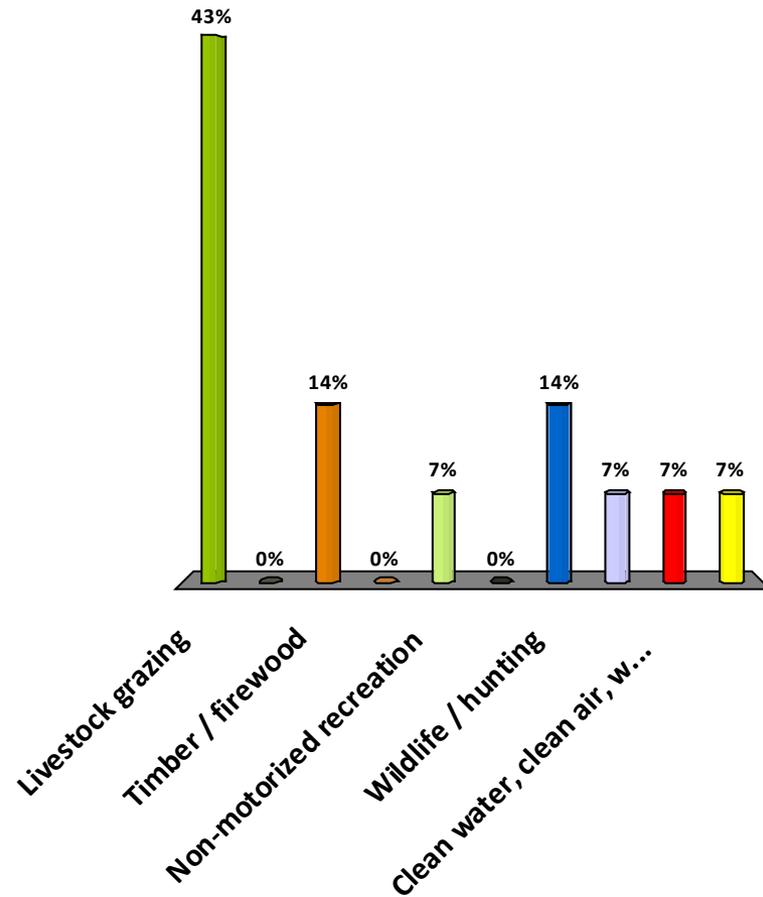
1. Where do you live?

- 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)



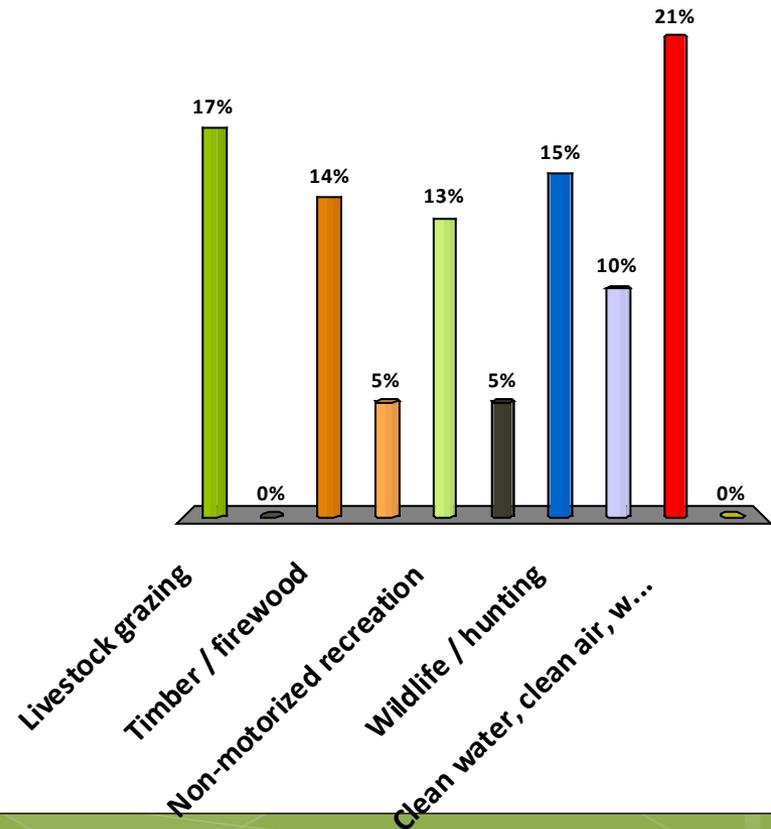
2. What is your primary interest in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



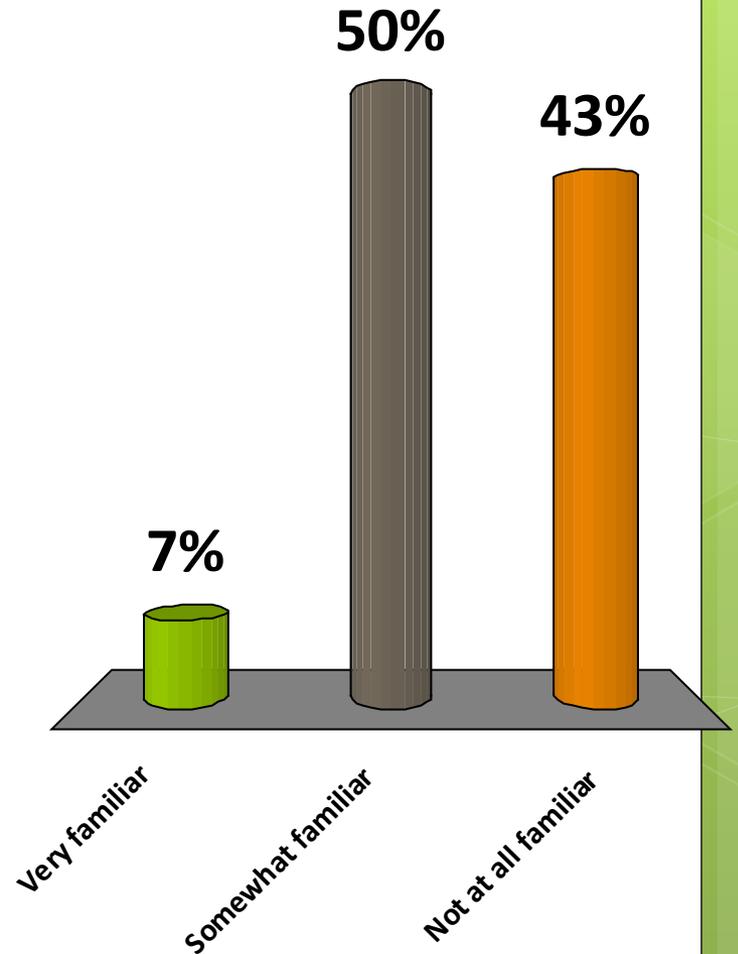
3. Which of the following are your **TOP 3** interests in the Rio Grande National Forest.

- 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
- J. Other



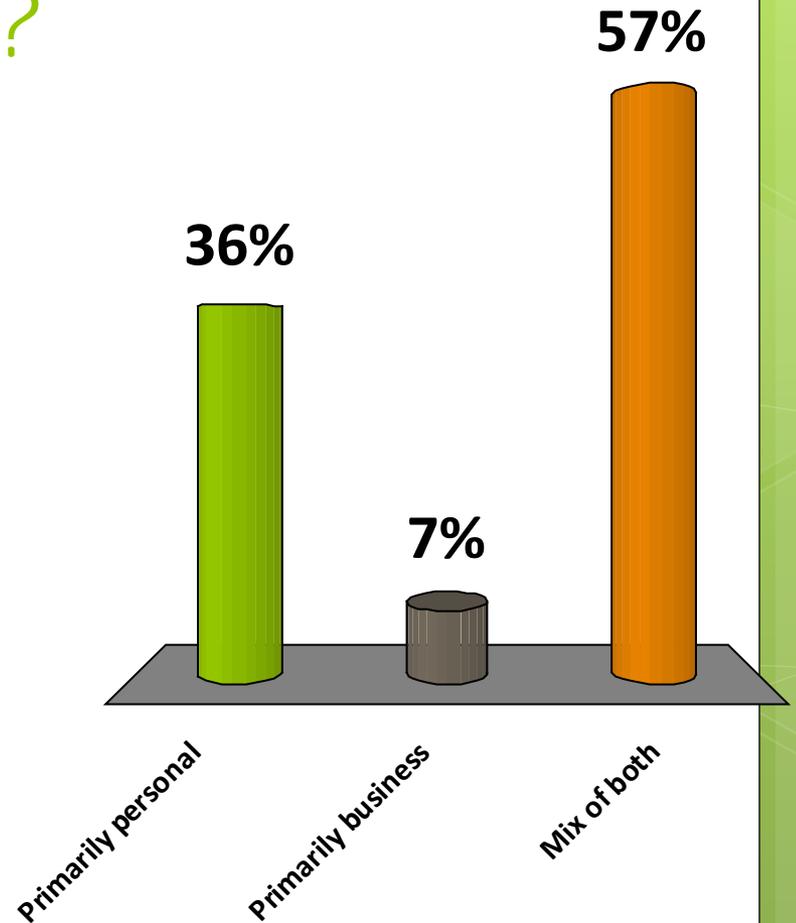
4. How familiar are you with the current Rio Grande National Forest Plan?

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



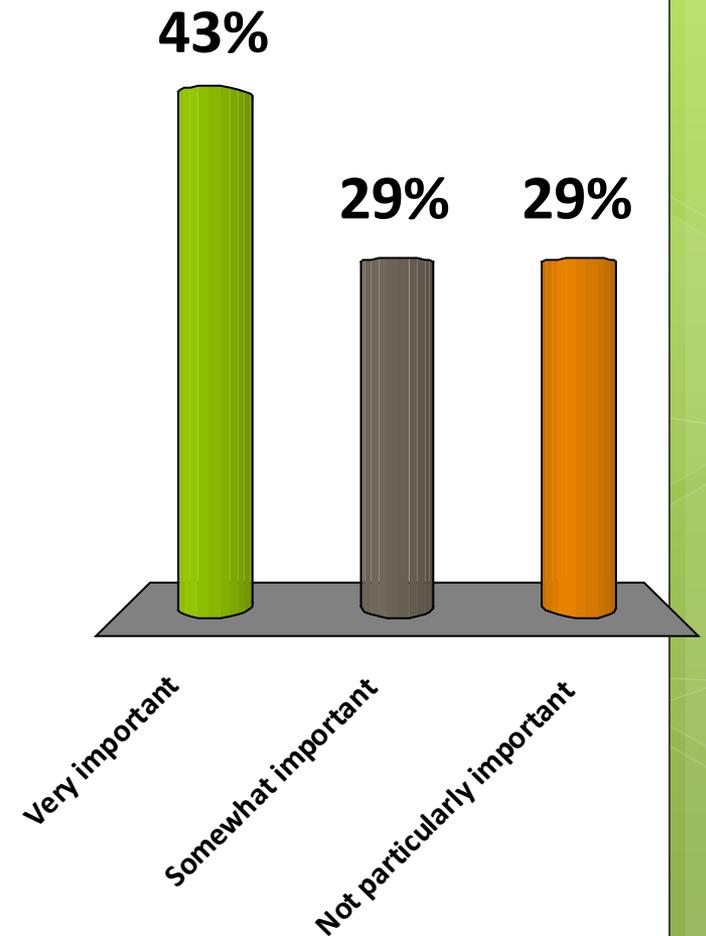
5. Do you use the Rio Grande National Forest primarily for personal or business purposes?

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



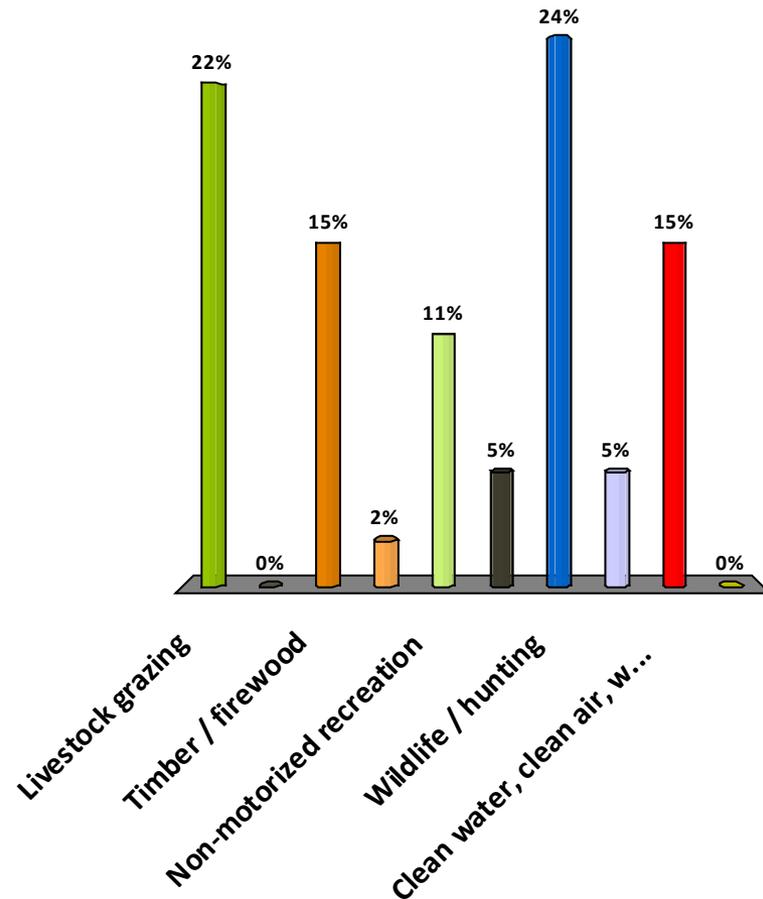
6. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your ability to make a living?

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



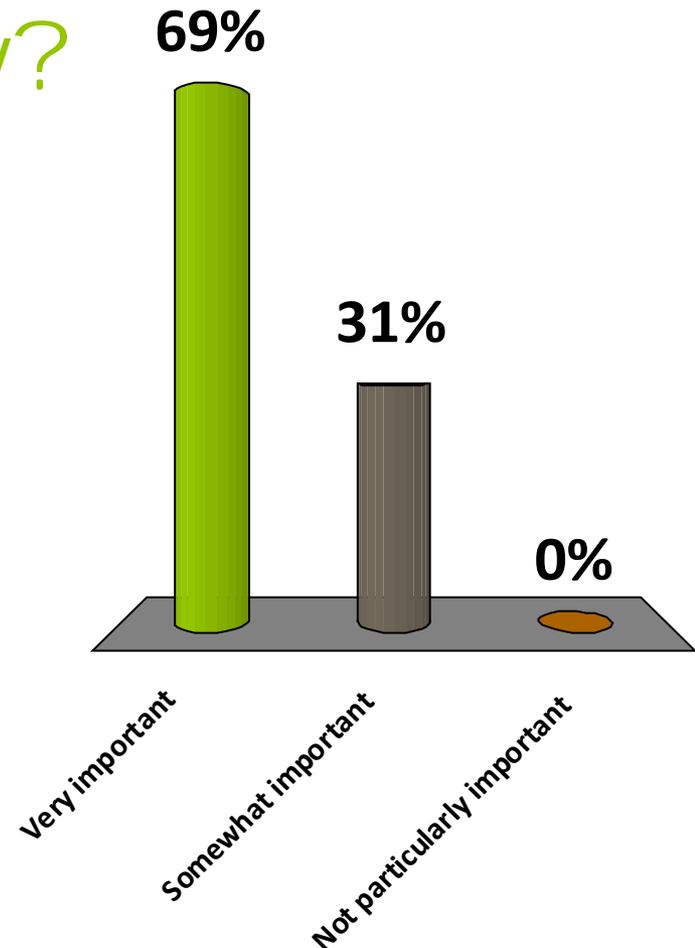
7. What are your community's TOP 3 uses or interests in the Rio Grande National Forest?

- 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



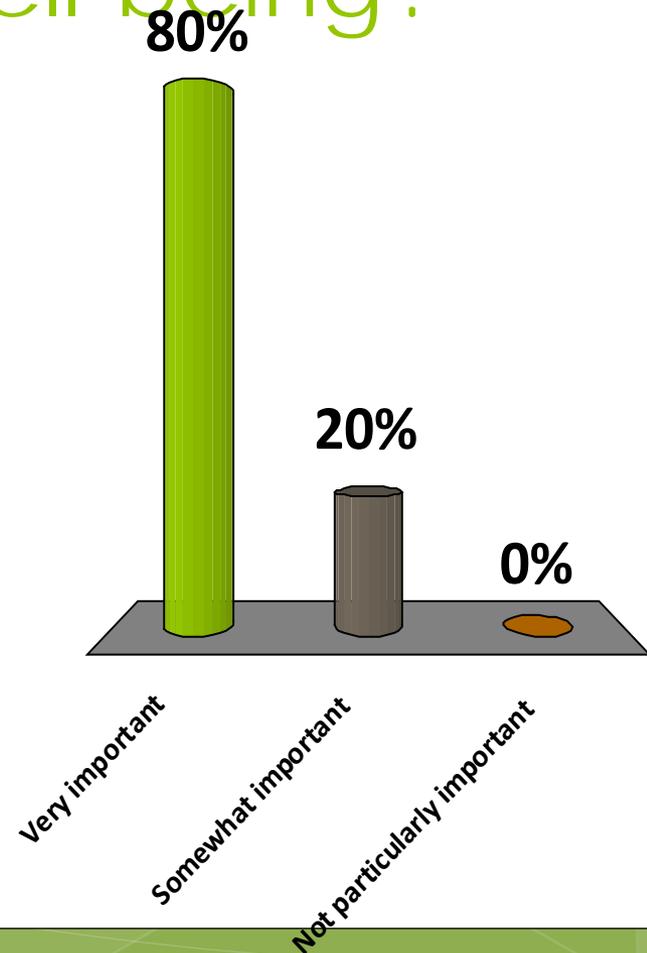
8. How important is the Rio Grande National Forest to your community's economic prosperity?

- 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

