AN ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION UNDER
2005 NATIONAL FOREST PLANNING REGULATIONS

by

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December 2007

Masters project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Environmental Management degree in the Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences of Duke University

2007
Abstract

Public participation has long played an important role in national forest planning. Under 1982 regulations, this participation has largely taken place through traditional notice and comment procedures mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In 2005, the Forest Service issued a new planning rule that excluded forest planning from NEPA procedures, but required a collaborative process in addition to traditional notice and comment periods. Some interest groups argued this approach degraded public participation, while the Forest Service argued it would provide for better public participation. The objective of this analysis is to determine how public participation in national forest planning might be impacted under the 2005 rule.

I interviewed participants in plan revision processes for three national forests - one taking place under the 1982 rule (Mark Twain), one taking place under the 2005 rule (Uwharrie), and one that switched from the 1982 to the 2005 rule (Western Montana Planning Zone). I analyzed the interview results using an evaluative framework that defined good public participation. The framework included the following elements: (1) a fair outcome, (2) equal access/representation, (3) equal voice/participation, (4) adequate influence, (5) logic/use of technical information, (6) resolving conflict, (7) building trust in institutions, and (8) educating and informing the public.

The Uwharrie, using a collaborative process, provided for good public participation, while the Mark Twain, using notice and comment processes, did not provide for good public participation. The results from the Western Montana Planning Zone were mixed, with the poor public participation due to a perceived lack of influence after switching to the 2005 planning rule. The results suggest that the 1982 rule can engender poor public participation, even when NEPA procedures are followed. The 2005 rule can provide for good public participation, but this is likely to occur only with collaborative-type activities. The biggest impediments to the public’s perceptions of good participation under the 2005 rule appear to be: (1) the new structure of the plans and the fact that they do not make specific management decisions, and (2) balancing both local and national interests, and both lay and professional input.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Lynn Maguire at the Nicholas School for her enthusiasm, guidance and thorough editing. She introduced me to the importance of public participation, and helped me transform mere curiosity into an organized project. I would also like to thank Hugh Irwin at the Southern Appalachian Forest Coalition in Asheville, NC for taking a leap of faith and hiring me to research the new planning rule during the summer of 2006. Completion of this project would not have been possible without the background knowledge and contacts from that summer. Also, thank you to the Stanback family for funding that internship. Last, but certainly not least, I would like to thank my wonderful husband Robert Beres for being incredibly patient and supportive through five long semesters of classes and two summers away from home.
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I. Introduction

The U.S. Forest Service, under the Department of Agriculture, manages over 193 million acres across 155 national forests and 20 national grasslands (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2007a). The agency manages these forests and grasslands (referred to collectively here as national forests) for multiple, diverse uses, including timber production, ecological restoration, research, and many kinds of recreation.

The public has historically played an active role in national forest management, especially ever since the 1970s, when controversy over destructive clearcutting practices and a growing environmental movement brought about new laws like the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) (National Forest Management Act 1976). One way in which the public is involved in national forest management is through Land and Resource Management Plans (referred to here as forest plans), which NFMA required for each national forest. The plan spells out long-term management goals for every area of the forest or grassland, including where timber can be cut, where recreation trails are located, and which species of plants and animals will be given special protection.

NFMA required the public to be involved in forest plan development and forest management activities. Until 2005, this largely took place under the procedures of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) (National Environmental Policy Act 1969). NEPA required environmental analysis, as well as opportunities for public notice and comment, for all major federal actions that impact the human environment.

In 2005, the Forest Service issued new regulations to implement NFMA. The 2005 rule represented a major shift in national forest planning by removing NEPA procedural requirements from the planning process. Because the new structure of a forest plan would not dictate any specific management activities or standards (such as where timber will be cut or which species will be protected), forest planning would not, the Forest Service argued, trigger environmental analysis under NEPA (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2006a).

Since national forest planning was no longer going to take place under the auspices of NEPA, many interest groups claimed that the Forest Service was removing the public from the process (Pegg 2002). However, the USFS argued that the new regulations would facilitate better participation because they required a collaborative process, in addition to traditional notice and
The purpose of this analysis is to analyze the quality of public participation in national forest planning under old and new regulations to determine if and how public participation may have changed due to the new planning rule. By reviewing existing literature and interviewing planning process participants, I will examine both intended public participation (what the laws and regulations require) and actual/perceived public participation (how participants perceive the process) with respect to the fairness and quality of the national forest planning process.

II. Background on national forest planning and public participation

Bierle and Cayford (2002) describe public participation in environmental decisionmaking as “a challenge to the traditional management of government policy by experts in administrative agencies.” This is nowhere more applicable than the Forest Service. The agency was established in 1905 to protect the country’s timber resources from unsustainable harvest by private companies. The first American forester, Gifford Pinchot, represented the establishment of a scientific approach to forestry built around a sustainability principle: the greatest good for the greatest number of people in the long run (Lewis 2005).

However, this type of scientific management of public natural resources created a tension between expert management and democratic accountability (Beierle and Cayford 2002). This tension surfaced in the late 1960s and ‘70s, when the Forest Service began using intensive forest management to meet the demand for new housing construction that followed World War II (Lewis 2005).

As recreation on national forests grew in popularity, the public encountered extensive clearcutting in places such as the Bitterroot National Forest in Montana and the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. Numerous groups filed lawsuits across the country challenging these practices and forcing the Forest Service to better uphold its multiple use mandate (Office of Technology Assessment 1992).

In the meantime, an upwelling of general awareness and activism towards environmental quality in the country was influencing the federal government to involve the public in natural resource management. The first manifestation of this was the National Environmental Policy...
Act of 1969 (NEPA), which required the federal government to look at the environmental impacts of its actions, and to give the public the opportunity to read and review this analysis (National Environmental Policy Act 1969).

As a result of public outcry and inquiry over clearcutting in the national forests, Congress passed the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA) (National Forest Management Act 1976). John R. McGuire, the Chief of the Forest Service from 1971 to 1979, described NFMA’s attempt to relieve the tension between expert management and democratic accountability by emphasizing the public’s role in forest management:

“…Congress with the new law has endorsed the concept that silvicultural prescriptions should be the province of the professional resource manager, not the legislators. But with this law, it also has made clear that it intends to keep an eye on what the resource manager is doing. Congress expects the resource manager to practice interdisciplinary planning and the public to be involved in land management decisions.” (McGuire 1976)

The first regulations to implement NFMA were issued in 1979, and spelled out specifically how the Forest Service was to involve the public in national forest management and planning (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 1979). These regulations required the Forest Service to not only inform the public about planning activities, but to explicitly consider public input in forest management plans and decisions.

The requirement to explicitly consider public input was removed in the 1982 amendments to the regulations (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 1982). This version (referred to here as the 1982 planning rule), called for the public to be involved in forest planning under the auspices of NEPA (Office of Technology Assessment 1992). This essentially called for the Forest Service to solicit public comments before, during and after the creation, revision or amendment of a forest plan and the associated environmental analysis.

Although NEPA provided a new mechanism for public participation in many environmental and natural resource decision processes, it did not necessarily resolve conflicts, particularly in national forest planning, and plans continued to be challenged with administrative appeals and litigation (Malmsheimer et al. 2004). The Forest Service continued to study ways to improve the planning process. In 1997 the Secretary of Agriculture appointed a committee of scientists to recommend improvements to the process, including the public participation aspects.
Their final report recommended an adaptive management approach, as well as more collaborative planning, particularly with other federal and state agencies (Johnson et al. 1999).

Before President Bill Clinton left office in 2000 the Forest Service published a final planning rule that attempted a new ecosystem management approach to planning based on the Committee of Scientists’ 1999 report. However, when President George W. Bush took office, the Forest Service recalled the 2000 planning rule and issued a new final rule in 2005 (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005b). This action was partly based on a Forest Service analysis that showed the 2000 rule was much more difficult to implement, and would cost 30% more to revise a forest plan than the proposed 2005 rule ($13 million and 6.5 years compared to $9 million and 5 years per forest on average (Alward et al. 2002)).

In March 2007 the US District Court for the Northern District of California issued an injunction against the Forest Service to stop using the 2005 rule because of several procedural violations. Because these are only violations of procedure, and not of substance, the Forest Service issued a new proposed rule (identical to the 2005 rule) and draft environmental impact statement in August 2007, presumably correcting the procedural problems with the 2005 rule. Therefore, this paper will continue to refer to the new regulations as the “2005 rule” since the 2007 rule is virtually identical and is not yet final.

Because planning processes are taking place under the 2005 rule, and there is controversy and uncertainty over how the public’s role might be impacted by this new rule, it is important to attempt to analyze the quality of public participation under the 2005 rule as compared to the 1982 rule.

### III. Research objectives

The objective of this research is to determine whether or not the new process can provide for “good” public participation, and to look at how public participation might be changing under the new rule. The basic question for research is: Does the 2005 national forest planning process provide for “good” public participation compared to the 1982 planning process? Additional questions include: What does the 2005 process look like on the forest level? Do participants think there are adequate and fair opportunities to participate in the new process? What factors are most important to providing for good public participation in national forest planning?
IV. Overview of the 1982 and 2005 rules

In order to research how public participation might change under the 2005 planning regulations, it is important to understand: (1) how the new regulation changed the forest planning process, (2) what public participation looked like under the 1982 rule, and (3) how the changes to the process might affect public participation.

The planning process and public participation under the 1982 rule

The 1982 regulations implementing the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) directed the Forest Service on how to involve the public in planning process. The regulations (Section 219.6) call for public participation in order to: (1) provide a larger base of information for planning decisions, (2) help the agency understand the “needs, concerns, and values of the public,” (3) inform the public about the planning process, and (4) help the public understand agency programs and actions (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 1979).

Public participation in national forest planning under the 1982 planning rule was largely characterized by notice and comment procedures required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (1969). The NFMA regulations explicitly require public participation in the preparation of environmental impact statements to conform to NEPA requirements. Because the 1982 rule relies so heavily on NEPA procedures for public participation, it is important to understand exactly what NEPA requires.

NEPA, signed into law in 1969, requires Federal agencies to prepare a detailed written analysis on the effects of major Federal actions that significantly impact the human environment. It is a procedural law, which means it does not require the agency to reject activities that have environmental impacts, but only requires that the agency analyze and document these impacts. This analysis takes the form of an environmental impact statement. In this statement, agencies are required to analyze a range of alternatives, including no action, and document each alternative’s impacts to the human environment.

The associated regulations that implement NEPA (Council for Environmental Quality 2007) further describe when environmental impact statements are needed and how they should be prepared. The regulations also outline the notice and comment procedure that has come to define the public’s role in the NEPA process. Mainly, the agency is required to request comments from appropriate agencies, tribes, and members of the public after preparing a draft
environmental impact statement but before preparing a final environmental impact statement. The agency is then required to assess and respond to these comments by either modifying the alternatives, developing new alternatives, improving its analyses, making factual corrections, or explaining why the comments do not warrant further response.

The 1982 planning rule requires, in order to fulfill the NEPA requirements described above, that the draft and final environmental impact statement should be available to the public for comment for at least three months. The rule also requires the Forest Service to hold the necessary public participation activities during this time to obtain adequate public input, but allows the Forest Service staff to determine which activities are necessary. The rule also mandates that public comments should be considered individually and by interest group to determine the “variety and intensity of viewpoints” about planning issues. In addition to the environmental impact statement for the forest plan itself, individual projects to implement the plan (such as timber sales) are also subject to environmental analysis under NEPA.

The 1982 planning rule also established an appeals procedure. Any interested person or group has 90 days to submit an administrative appeal after the plan is approved. The appeal is then reviewed by an official one administrative level higher than the officer who made the decision to approve the plan. Alternatively, groups and individuals can sue the Forest Service if they feel that the plan, or the planning process itself, violates laws such as NEPA, NFMA or the Endangered Species Act (Endangered Species Act 1973). Appellants must have exhausted all administrative options in order to sue.

Although the National Forest Management Act opened up Forest Service decisionmaking to the public, the requirements did not immediately provide for quality, collaborative decisionmaking on all forests. One of the main objectives of NFMA was to bring national forest planning out from the “back room” and give the public access (not only access but equal access) to influence the planning process. The NEPA procedures for notice and comment periods provided standard and equal opportunities for all participants to provide input into the planning process. However, the Forest Service’s critique of land management planning (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 1990) found that only three percent of non-Forest Service personnel surveyed perceived that public participation affected plan changes (compared to 57% of Forest Service personnel surveyed). Many stakeholders, including the agency, have characterized the process as follows:
“… the Forest Service called a public hearing to solicit views on issues the plan was to address, forcing interest groups into hard positions at the outset. The Planners then retreated to their offices, emerging sometime later with a draft, followed by another public hearing – and increased polarization. In due course, a final plan was released and greeted with a barrage of appeals.” (Office of Technology Assessment 1992)

Blahna and Yonts-Shepard (1989) reviewed 13 early forest planning processes and found that most did not meet the public participation goals of the planning regulations. However, Gericke and Sullivan (1994) studied 61 forests and found that the Forest Service had in fact met the requirements of public participation, yet there was still considerable conflict over the plans.

Further evidence of failed public participation and conflict over plans can be found in the extremely high number of appeals and lawsuits filed over forest plans. By 1989 the Forest Service had received 811 appeals to national forest plans (Gericke and Sullivan 1994). From 1970 through 2001, there were 18 cases decided by courts of appeals related to planning (this represented 15% of all cases where the Forest Service was a defendant) (Malmsheimer et al. 2004).

However, there was some early success in collaborative national forest planning. The Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia mounted a successful collaborative participatory process after its draft plan was met with considerable public opposition in 1984 (Steelman 2001). Despite a few successful cases, meeting the minimal requirements for public participation under the 1982 rule did not necessarily provide for: (1) a good and fair process, or (2) a conflict-free plan outcome.

Introduction to the 2005 planning rule

The 2005 planning rule represents a paradigm shift in forest planning. The regulation calls for plans that are strategic in nature, take one to two years to complete, and do not make any specific management decisions (such as where to harvest timber, where to build trails, or how to protect endangered species). As a result, the Forest Service argues that forest plans, and the forest planning process, do not trigger environmental analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act.1 Therefore, public participation for future planning processes will not

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1 The Forest Service issued a new “categorical exclusion” for forest plans in 2006 (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 15 December 2006). Categorical exclusions are categories of actions that an agency has determined
take place under NEPA (but individual projects to implement plans will still be subject to environmental analysis under NEPA).

Rather than deferring to NEPA procedures (largely notice and comment periods) to provide for public participation in the planning process, the 2005 planning rule requires the use of an open and meaningful “collaborative and participatory approach” (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005b). However, similar to the 1982 rule, the 2005 rule gives the Forest Service discretion to determine the methods and timing of public participation activities. It also allows the planning officials to move forward without a collaborative process if collaborative efforts are unsuccessful.

The 2005 rule does not eliminate notice and comment periods that occurred under the 1982 rule. In addition to the collaborative process, the rule mandates formal opportunities to comment on and object to the plan. Similar to the 1982 rule, formal comment periods are required after the notice of initiation, during the public collaboration process, and after the proposed plan are released.

The 2005 rule exchanges the appeals process for an objection process. Whereas appeals under the 1982 rule were submitted and resolved after the final forest plan was approved (post-decisional), under the 2005 rule objections are submitted and resolved before the final forest plan is approved (pre-decisional). Anyone who participated in the planning process (by submitting written comments) can submit an objection to a proposed forest plan within 30 days (the 1982 appeals process gave 90 days to submit an appeal).

V. Possible implications of the 2005 rule for public participation

This paradigm shift from the 1982 rule to the 2005 rule has the potential to impact public participation in many ways. First, the use of a collaborative process, in addition to traditional notice and comment periods, is likely to provide for more and better public participation in the planning process.

A collaborative process can be defined as “collective process for resolving conflicts and advancing shared visions involving a set of diverse stakeholders” (Gray 1989). According to the

to not trigger environmental analysis under NEPA. This prevents the agency from having to complete duplicate environmental analysis documentation for routine activities.
Public Participation Spectrum in Figure 1 (International Association for Public Participation 2005), a collaborative process generally provides greater public influence over decisionmaking. The 1982 planning rule, as written, appears to evoke the “Consult” category. Under the 1982 rule, an environmental impact statement required the Forest Service to select its preferred choice among a set of plan alternatives. At the outset, the agency had already made up its mind about what it wanted in the plan (or at least it is perceived as having made up its mind). The 2005 planning rule requires a “Collaborative” process, which relies on the public to help develop the forest plan to the greatest extent possible.

A successful collaborative national forest planning process should provide more participant influence over planning decisions than the traditional notice and comment process. This is because collaboration, by definition, means that the Forest Service and the public will work together to design a forest plan, rather than the public responding to the Forest Service’s preferred plan (as under the 1982 process). A collaborative process might also help to resolve conflict and share information among participants.

The right side of the spectrum (the most public influence) is not always necessarily “better” than the left side (the least consideration of public input). Rather, there are appropriate uses for each type of participation, as well as ways to successfully implement each type of public participation. In theory, good public participation can occur under either model, but in the case of national forest planning, more public influence will likely provide for better public participation. However, because the quality of a collaborative process (as required by the 2005 rule) can vary greatly, it is still possible for a forest to go through the motions of a collaborative process without giving true consideration to the public’s input. Because the Forest Service is not required to respond to public input, as it was in an environmental impact statement under the 1982 rule, there may be more opportunity to ignore or dismiss input that does not already align with that of the planning staff.
Figure 1. Spectrum of public participation. The categories define different levels of engaging the public in decisionmaking processes (International Association for Public Participation 2005).
The structure of forest plans under the 2005 rule may also necessarily provide for more public influence over the plan. The new plans are comprised of desired conditions for different areas of the forest, and strategies for how the forest will move towards those activities. Plans under the 1982 process dictated more specific management activities and analyzed the impacts from those activities. Therefore, plans under the 2005 rule can be viewed as more “values based.” In a case study of the Monongahela National Forest’s plan revision in the mid 1980s, Steelman (1999) concluded that the public comment process was more effective and efficient at providing values based input than technical input. If plans under the 2005 rule are more focused on defining these values for the forest, and less focused on technical analysis, then it may follow that public comments (either written or through collaborative meetings) would be more meaningful under this process.

A collaborative process, because is it more reliant on meetings and less reliant on written comments, may give more weight to those who can attend the meetings. Therefore, there will be more local influence in the planning process, and possibly fewer participants overall. On the other hand, a shorter process (1-2 years versus 3-5 years or longer under the 1982 rule) will keep more people engaged (especially those who are not paid to participate as part of a job), which may bring in participants with less extreme viewpoints, who might not have participated otherwise. Also, there may be some element of representation of national interests by local attendees. For example, the local environmental group can be expected to represent distant environmental issues, and the local horseback riding trail camp owner can be expected to represent the interests of horseback riders from the urban area located a few hundred miles away.

Another possible implication of the 2005 rule for public participation stems from switching away from a post-decisional appeals process to a pre-decisional objection process. The differences between the two processes are: the time period to submit the objection is only 30 days versus 90 days for an appeal; an objection must be resolved before the plan can be approved; and the person or organization must have submitted written comments during the planning process in order to file an objection.

There is some discussion in published literature over the implications of changing the appeals process for national forest planning. Manring (2004) argues that the Forest Service is attempting to “lock the back door” and manage conflict at the “front end” of the planning process, which can negatively impact environmental groups’ ability to influence management
decisions. However, Manring does not fully discuss the differences in the two processes, and assumes that a pre-decisional objection does not carry the same weight as a post-decisional appeal. Manring states that “Appeals could be filed without having participated in lengthy, place-based collaborative processes. This made it easier for national environmental groups to challenge Forest Service plans and projects.” Since the only requirement for an objection under the 2005 rule is that the objector have submitted written comments during the planning process, it does not appear that this strategy for environmental groups would change under a pre-decisional appeal. Also, as Manring points out, filing an appeal or objection without participating in the collaborative planning process may undermine the efforts of those who took the time to participate.

There are numerous possible implications (both negative and positive) to public participation in national forest planning under the 2005 rule. Although the stated planning regulations give an indication of what kind of public participation is required in the 1982 and 2005 processes, it is the implementation of these processes that ultimately determine the quality of public participation.

VI. Research methods

Approach to research

The ideal way to answer the research questions would be to compare quantitative data about public participation under planning processes using the 1982 and 2005 planning rules in similar situations (on the same national forest, with the same Forest Service staff, and the same participants), with the purpose of controlling for all other factors besides a change in planning rule. Ideally, this approach would examine numerous planning processes (a large sample size).

Since national forest planning processes are large-scale social interactions involving many individuals operating in complex social environments, a traditional deductive approach to research is not possible. This type of “subject” is better suited for a case-study based approach, which allows the researcher to explore a complex situation in depth. Also, because forest plans are revised every 15 to 20 years, it is neither feasible nor desirable to compare planning processes under the 1982 and 2005 rule on the same forest, because many factors besides the planning rule will have changed.
Additionally, the research questions are not suited to quantitative data because they involve subjective judgments based on people’s perceptions and experiences. These types of questions are better suited to qualitative data collection through interviews. Also, there are very few planning processes that have been initiated or completed under the 2005 rule, which makes it even more difficult to rely on any type of quantitative methods for the analysis.

Therefore, the most appropriate method to answer the research questions at this time, given resource and time constraints, is with a qualitative case study of public participation in planning processes that have recently taken place under both the 1982 and 2005 rules.

Methods

This research analysis consisted of three steps: (1) defining “good” public participation by creating an evaluative framework, (2) collecting qualitative data on the cases by interviewing planning process participants, and (3) applying the evaluative framework to the data collected in order to draw conclusions about how the 2005 planning rule impacts public participation.

The first step was to define “good” public participation in a national forest planning process in terms of an evaluative framework. Evaluative frameworks help to (1) identify when certain participatory processes are appropriate, (2) identify which participatory processes work, (3) justify or refute criticisms, and (4) assess and refine efforts to institutionalize collaborative processes (Conley and Moote 2003). An evaluative framework is a useful tool to consistently analyze the information that will be collected in the case studies. There is a considerable amount of literature on public participation that I used to develop the evaluative framework.

The second step of the analysis was to collect qualitative data from participants in national forest planning processes. Two national forest planning cases under the 2005 rule were chosen for the analysis: the Uwharrie National Forest in North Carolina and the Western Montana Planning Zone (one planning process comprising the Lolo, Bitterroot and Flathead National Forests). The Uwharrie National Forest was chosen because it was one of the only national forests in the country to use the 2005 rule from the beginning of its plan revision process. The Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) was chosen as a good contrasting case to the Uwharrie National Forest. The WMPZ switched to the 2005 rule in the middle of the planning process. Although I initially intended to study only the Lolo National Forest, I decided
to use the WMPZ process because most of the interview subjects had participated in all three processes simultaneously, and would have difficulty isolating their responses to just the Lolo.

Comparing the Uwharrie and the WMPZ provided better insight into the 2005 rule than a single case by analyzing whether or not good public participation can occur in forests with drastically different social demographics and resource management issues. The Uwharrie National Forest is a relatively small, fragmented forest in the eastern U.S., where there are few public lands. The WMPZ comprises millions of acres in the west, where there has traditionally been more conflict over management of the vast amounts of federally owned land.

In addition to comparing two planning processes under the 2005 rule, I also analyzed a recent planning process using the 1982 rule to examine the quality of public participation in the 1982 planning process as it has evolved over time. The Mark Twain National Forest in Missouri was chosen because it completed a planning process in 2005, right before the new rule was published. Like the Uwharrie, the Mark Twain is a relatively small, fragmented forest in a state with few public lands. Applying the evaluative framework to the Mark Twain provided a good comparison to the Uwharrie.

I identified potential interview subjects for the three forests mainly through internet searches for participating interest groups and public planning documents such as meeting notes and sign-in sheets. I also identified subjects, to a small extent, through referrals from other interview subjects and Forest Service planning staff. If contact information was available, I contacted one or two potential subjects from each type of interest group (environmental, motorized recreation, non-motorized recreation, wildlife, timber, and adjacent landowner) via phone or e-mail to request an interview. This process was repeated until three to five interviews with diverse interests were scheduled and completed for each forest. I interviewed subjects over the phone for one 30-60 minute session during September 2007, using a standard set of interview questions developed from the evaluative framework described in the next section. During the interview, I paraphrased the subjects’ comments and documented important quotes.

The final step of the analysis, once data collection was complete, was to apply the evaluative framework to the qualitative data compiled from the interviews. I organized comments and quotes by each criterion of the evaluative framework, and reviewed these comments manually to determine whether or not the interview subjects perceived public participation for that criterion as “good” or “bad.” In most cases, the interview subject provided
direct feedback on each criterion (for example, “Yes, I think there was equal access to the process because…”). In some cases, when a subject’s judgment of a criterion was not as obvious (for example, “The meetings were not held in a convenient location, but all interest groups were represented.”), then I categorized the response for that criterion as “mixed.”

The results section summarizes the responses for each evaluative criterion by national forest. If all subjects did not agree on the quality of a criterion (for example, whether or not there was equal access to the process), or the responses were “mixed,” then I discuss the range of responses for each criterion to illustrate this disagreement.

VII. Development of the evaluative criteria

To determine if the 2005 planning rule provides for good public participation, “good” participation must first be defined. Based on existing literature, there are three distinct dimensions of national forest planning processes that can be evaluated: (1) justice/fairness of the process (Leventhal et al. 1980; Leventhal 1980; Lind and Tyler 1988; Moote et al. 1997; Tuler and Webler 1999; Rowe and Frewer 2000; McCool and Guthrie 2001; Smith and McDonough 2001; Maguire and Lind 2003), (2) quality and acceptability of the outcome (Leventhal et al. 1980; Lind and Tyler 1988; Smith and McDonough 2001), and (3) other social goals (such as education and conflict resolution) (Beierle and Cayford 2002).

Procedural justice

Maguire and Lind (2003) found that “government authorities engaged in decision making for which public support is needed would do well to employ decision-making processes that satisfy citizens’ and stakeholders’ perceptions of fairness and justice.” Given the high level of controversy and number of appeals with Forest Service decisionmaking, this is an important goal in national forest planning processes.

The theory of procedural justice argues that stakeholders’ satisfaction with decisions largely depends on whether or not they feel they have been treated fairly, regardless of the particular outcome of the process (Lind and Tyler 1988). In the case of national forest planning, this theory suggests a distinction between satisfaction with the resulting forest plan (management
decisions), and satisfaction with the planning process (meetings, forums or other interactions through which the public participates in the creation of the forest plan).

Analyzing for procedural justice will separate stakeholders’ satisfaction with planning outcomes from perceptions of fairness and equality throughout the process. This is particularly important in “messy” Forest Service planning processes where stakeholders’ interests and desires for land uses can differ greatly, and even contradict each other (for example, wilderness advocates and motorized vehicle users).

The procedural justice theory also emphasizes a difference between simply involving the public and involving the public in a way that is fair and just. Smith and McDonough (2001) point out that it is possible for “all the rules and guidelines of public participation to be followed in a mechanical way, while still leaving citizens feeling they were treated unfairly because, for example, they thought they were treated disrespectfully.” This distinction is particularly important for national forest planning, where the Forest Service can follow the directions of the planning rule (i.e., issue notice and comment periods and host public meetings), but still carry out these activities in a way that participants perceive as unfair or inequitable.

The elements of procedural justice were first identified in the contexts of law and dispute resolution (Lind and Tyler 1988). Levanthal (Levanthal et al. 1980; Leventhal 1980) identified six general procedural justice elements (consistency, bias suppression, accuracy of information, correctability, representativeness, and ethicality) and the process components that might be judged in order to analyze procedural justice (such as processing appeals and information). Recent studies of natural resource decisionmaking and national forest planning processes have revealed aspects of procedural justice and fairness, parallel to Levanthal’s rules, that contribute to successful processes in these decisionmaking contexts, including (1) adequate representation, (2) equal voice, (3) consideration of ideas and input, (4) accurate and adequate technical information to inform the process, and (5) absence of bias (Tuler and Webler 1999; Rowe and Frewer 2000; McCool and Guthrie 2001; Smith and McDonough 2001; Maguire and Lind 2003).

One of the most important aspects of procedural justice for national forest planning is whether or not the public truly influences the resulting forest plan. The main purpose of involving the public in forest planning is to improve decisionmaking, so it is important that the public is able to influence the outcome of the process. While it is nearly impossible to gauge the
extent to which Forest Service personnel consider public input, the critical factor of a procedurally just process is whether or not participants perceive that their input is considered.

Another important question of procedural justice is: who deserves access to the process? Participatory democracy theory suggests that a truly participatory process will involve the “general, nonactivist public” (Moote et al. 1997). Research supports that individual citizens are less likely than paid professionals or interest group representatives to participate in governmental decision making because: (1) the costs far outweigh the benefits (Pateman 1970; Kweit and Kweit 1987), (2) citizens feel discouraged by class bias and technical bias of agency officials, and (3) organized interest groups traditionally dominate public hearings and meetings, which can be intimidating (Kathlene and Martin 1991).

Outcomes

An analysis of public participation in national forest planning should also be concerned with stakeholder perceptions about the quality and fairness of resulting plan, as distinct from the planning process. Psychological theories of justice identify distributive justice as the second key component of the justice judgment of any given process (procedural justice being the first) (Lind and Tyler 1988). Distributive justice compares the process or decision outcome to some standard of fairness or deservedness. Some specific aspects of this include: (1) outcomes that are based on rational decisionmaking and accurate information (Smith and McDonough 2001), and (2) a method for correcting bad outcomes, such as through appeals processes (Levanthal et al. 1980).

In addition to a fair procedure and a fair outcome, I am also interested in the general acceptability of the final plan. If stakeholders feel that the forest plan meets their interests, they are less likely to appeal or litigate the plan. Lind and Tyler (1988) argue that stakeholders are more likely to accept undesirable outcomes if they were treated fairly during the process, but national forest planning participants have the option to appeal, object to, and/or litigate final plans if they do not agree with the substance of the final outcome.

Other social goals

Beierle and Cayford (2002) propose that one of the three ways of viewing public participation is as a means to achieving broad social goals (the other two are: as a way to
democratize bureaucratic decisionmaking and as a way for particular interests to achieve their goals). They outline five broad goals along these lines: (1) incorporating public values into decisions (as a balance to expert management), (2) improving the substantive quality of decisions, (3) resolving conflict among competing interests, (4) building trust in institutions, and (5) educating and informing the public.

Although many of these criteria may not be central to a participant’s perception of a just and fair national forest planning process, they certainly contribute to a successful process, and are some of the additional benefits of using a collaborative process. I include them in this analysis in order to determine if they are better achieved under the 1982 or the 2005 planning rule, or neither.

**Resulting evaluative framework**

I constructed the following evaluative framework for this analysis from the preceding three dimensions of public participation in national forest planning processes.

**Criterion 1: Distributive justice – quality and fairness of the outcome**

The resulting plan should be seen as fair. This is separate from the fairness of the process. There should also be access to a mechanism to review and overturn bad decisions, such as an appeal or objection process, or litigation in court. I am also interested in whether or not the resulting plan met none, some or all of the participants’ interests.

**Criterion 2: Procedural justice**

2(a): Access/representation – All who have an interest in the national forest and its management have *reasonable* access to the process. This involves: invitation process, meeting logistics (timing, frequency, location) and the flow of information about the process. Access includes all types of interests, and both lay citizens and professionals. Participants should have the resources necessary to fulfill their roles: access to information, time, materials, etc.

2(b): Voice/participation – All participants have an equal voice in the process. This involves both facilitator attitude (unbiased, respectful) and process logistics (seating arrangements during discussions, etc).
2(c): Influence – All stakeholders’ viewpoints (comments and questions) are considered and responded to during the process. They feel that their input is taken seriously by the facilitator. The public is involved before the forest has made planning decisions. The forest plan should be flexible and responsive to the public’s input. The forest may, however, come to the process with some pre-established ideas.

2(d): Use of technical information/logic – The process should be informed by and responsive to relevant and accurate technical information. Decisions made in the planning process should be seen as rational, and not unduly influenced by political concerns.

Criterion 3: Other goals of public participation

3(a): Resolving conflict among competing interests – Successful public participation helps stakeholders to resolve conflicts and collaborate to achieve other goals.

3(b): Building trust in institutions – Successful national forest planning processes will help restore trust in the Forest Service as the steward of the public’s national forests and grasslands. It will lead to increased collaboration and less time spent on appeals (or objections) and litigation.

3(c): Educating and informing the public – This is where stakeholder to stakeholder interactions come into play. A good process will involve education and relationship building between stakeholders, as well as between the Forest Service and stakeholders.

From the preceding evaluative framework, I created the following set of questions for the interview subjects (Fig. 2).
Introductory
Describe your interest group’s participation, as well your personal participation, in the forest planning process.
1. How long were you involved?
2. What meetings did you attend?
3. Who was the facilitator during these meetings?
4. To what extent did you provide written comments?

Criterion 1: Distributive justice
Outcome
5. How satisfied are you with the resulting plan? Why or why not?
6. Do you think the resulting plan is fair? Why or why not?
7. Did the resulting plan meet all, some or none of your interests?
8. Do you (or did you), or your organization, plan to submit an appeal/objection to the plan or sue the USFS over the plan?

Criterion 2: Procedural justice
2(a): Access/representation
9. In your opinion, was there equal access to the process? If no, who was not provided access and why not?
10. Do you think all who have an interest in this national forest’s management, and the resulting plan, were represented in the process? If no, who, or what viewpoint, was missing from the process? Why?
11. How did the timing and frequency of meetings affect your participation? Was the process too short or too long? Explain.
12. Were meeting locations convenient for you? Why or why not?
13. [If part of an organized group] Did you have adequate time to consult with members of your interest group between plan meetings?
14. Did you feel that you had adequate time, materials and information to participate effectively in the process? Why or why not?

2(b): Voice/participation
15. In your opinion, did the process favor any one stakeholder or interest? If so, can you explain how?
16. Do you think all participants had an equal voice in the process? If so, what contributed to this? If not, please explain.
17. In your opinion, did any one stakeholder or interest dominate the conversation? Why or why not?
18. Do you think the meeting space facilitated equal participation? If not, please explain.
19. In your opinion, did the facilitator treat all participants with respect? Why or why not?
20. Do you think the facilitator treated all participants equally? If not, explain.
21. In your opinion, was the facilitator biased? If so, explain.

2(c): Influence
22. In your opinion, were all stakeholders’ viewpoints considered and addressed in the process by the decision maker? What about the facilitator? Why or why not?
23. Were you able to get items on the agenda for discussion? If not, explain.
24. Were your questions answered? If not, explain.
25. Do you think the facilitator treated all questions, comments, and input with respect? If not, explain.
26. In your opinion, were stakeholders involved before forest planners had already decided what they wanted in the plan? Do you have evidence of this?
27. In your opinion, was the resulting plan based on rational arguments and decisionmaking? Why or why not?
28. In your opinion, did the USFS make a compelling case for the resulting plan? Why or why not?
29. In your opinion, was the process unduly influenced by political concerns? If so, explain.

2(d): Use of technical information
30. Do you think decisions were based on sound technical information? Why or why not?
31. Did you feel that you had access to the technical information? Was it presented at the right level of detail, in a way that could be understood?
32. Do you think current and relevant information informed the process, such as inventories, field monitoring, GIS, etc? Why or why not?
33. Did the process facilitator respond to your requests for technical information, if you had any? If not, explain.

Criterion 3: Other goals of public participation
3(a): Incorporating public values and resolving conflict among competing interests
34. Did this process help you to build working relationships with other stakeholders? Did it increase any conflicts you had with other stakeholders? Why?
35. In your opinion, did your participation influence the plan? To what extent? Can you give examples of why or why not?
36. Do you think the resulting plan resolved conflict or heightened it? Why?

3(b): Building trust in institutions
37. Did the process increase or decrease your trust in the USFS? What about the level of conflict with the USFS? Why?
38. Did the process increase or decrease your trust in other stakeholders? Why?

3(c): Educating and informing the public
39. Do you think the process help to form a shared understanding of forest management issues among stakeholders? Why or why not?
40. Did the process help you to understand or empathize with other stakeholder’s values and/or positions?
41. Do you think the process help other stakeholders to understand or empathize with your values and/or positions?

Figure 2. Interview questions. The questions were derived from the evaluative framework to judge the quality of public participation in the case studies.
VIII. Introduction to the case study national forests

The Uwharrie National Forest, the Mark Twain National Forest, and the three forests in the Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) – Bitterroot, Flathead, and Lolo – comprise the case studies to determine how public participation has changed from the 1982 to the 2005 planning rule. The following provides an introduction to these national forests and their social and natural resource management contexts.

The Mark Twain National Forest

The Mark Twain is Missouri’s only national forest. It is made up of about 1.5 million acres, mostly found in the southern Ozark Highlands (Fig. 3). This region is largely rural, and the vast majority of land is privately owned for non-industrial purposes. The forest is comprised of the oaks and hickories typical of the central U.S. hardwood forest, along with pines on the drier ridges and southern slopes (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2007b).

Historically, Native Americans manipulated this area with frequent fire. Extensive timber harvesting, mining, agriculture and grazing began in the late 1800s. This intensive use continued until Missouri asked the US Forest Service to establish the national forest in the 1930s, when the government began to restore eroded soils, create wildlife preserves, and reestablish wildlife populations such as deer and turkey (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2007b).

The Mark Twain National Forest receives over 550,000 visits annually, including over 22,000 visits to Wilderness areas. Most visitors participate in the following activities (from highest to lowest participation): viewing wildlife and natural features, hiking, other non-motorized activities, picknicking, hunting, camping, gathering food or firewood, nature studies, driving, off-highway vehicle use, fishing, boating, biking, horseback riding and visiting historic sites (Kocis et al. 2003b).
Figure 3. Mark Twain National Forest management units. The forest is comprised of 12 units in nine geographically dispersed tracts of forest land in the Missouri southern highlands. (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005c).
Mark Twain National Forest began its plan revision process in spring 2002 under the 1982 rule. The Forest Service planned to focus on the following major areas: (1) maintaining oak-hickory, shortleaf pine, and oak-pine communities; (2) managing oak decline and restoring open woodland habitats; (3) revising list of management indicator species; (4) using prescribed fire to restore ecosystems and reduce hazardous fuels; (5) adjusting management area boundaries; (6) evaluating inventoried roadless areas for official Wilderness designation and reviewing rivers for inclusion into wild and scenic rivers system; and, (7) restoring and maintaining riparian areas (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2002). The Forest Service released the draft plan and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in February 2004. The final plan was released in December 2005.

The Forest Service held the following public meetings around the state regarding the plan: (1) three public meetings in January/February 2002 before publishing their notice of intent to revise the plan, (2) four public meetings in June 2002 to discuss the planning process and gather plan input, (3) four public meetings in April 2003 to discuss the direction of the plan revision, (4) two public meetings in February 2004 to discuss the plan alternatives, and (5) five public meetings in February/March 2005 after the release of the draft plan and EIS. The Forest Service also held numerous meetings with interest groups and state and federal agencies upon request (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005d).

The Uwharrie National Forest

The Uwharrie National Forest is a relatively small (50,368 acres), fragmented forest in the North Carolina Piedmont within a short drive of the state’s largest population centers (Fig. 4). Located between the coastal plain and the Blue Ridge Mountains, and containing portions of the Uwharrie Mountains, the Uwharrie’s ecological systems include oak-hickory, longleaf pine, glade, barrens, wetlands, and planted forests. The fragmented nature of the landscape makes it challenging to manage. Most of the lands, bought by the federal government during the Great Depression, were historically used for commercial forestry or agriculture. The forest is now comprised of 61 pieces of property intermingled with privately owned land (Fig. 5). There are several small towns located within and just outside the forest boundary (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005e).
The Uwharrie National Forest began its planning process under the 2005 rule in November 2005. The Forest Service identified the following issues that needed to be addressed in the plan revision process: (1) increasing tourism and recreation opportunities, (2) increasing wildlife food supply and habitat for hunting, (3) a change in amount and type of timber products harvested, (4) improvement of roads and trails system, (5) interpretation of historical resources, (6) restoring native ecosystems, (7) restoring the natural role of fire, (8) controlling invasive plants, (9) stream restoration, and (10) soil erosion (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005f).

The Forest Service held a series of 10 public meetings in Troy, North Carolina, from September 2005 to July 2006. During these meetings, attendees participated in different activities, facilitated by Forest Service personnel, to help develop the plan components. There were also two field trips to discuss vegetation and trail management (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2006b).

The Uwharrie National Forest released their proposed forest plan in February 2007 for a 90 day comment period. The Forest Service planned to release the final forest plan in fall 2007, but this was delayed by the federal injunction against the 2005 rule, issued in March 2007.

Figure 4. National forests in North Carolina. The Uwharrie National Forest, one of four in the state, provides recreation opportunities for numerous visitors from the state’s largest population centers.
Figure 5. Uwharrie National Forest land ownership. The forest, located in the Piedmont of North Carolina, is comprised of numerous parcels of Forest Service owned land intermingled among privately owned lands and the small communities of the Uwharrie Mountains (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2005e).
The Bitterroot, Lolo, and Flathead National Forests (Western Montana Planning Zone)

The Bitterroot, Lolo and Flathead National Forests comprise 5.9 million acres in western Montana (a small part of the Bitterroot also extends into Idaho), an area dominated by federal land ownership (Fig. 6). Each forest receives around 1 million visits per year for activities such as hiking, skiing/snowboarding, off-highway vehicle use, and horseback riding. The three forests also contain a substantial amount of Wilderness area. The Lolo surrounds the growing community of Missoula, Montana, and most of the visits are from this area. Most visitors to the Flathead are from Kalispell, Montana, while most visitors to the Bitterroot are from the smaller communities south of Missoula (Kocis et al. 2003a).

The Forest Service combined the plan revision processes for the Bitterroot, Lolo and Flathead National Forests into one, calling it the Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ). The Forest Service published its proposal to revise the Lolo, Bitterroot and Flathead National Forest plans in May 2002, and its notice of intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in January 2004. Planning staff proposed changes in the following areas: (1) motorized recreation access, (2) ecosystem management, (3) interface with private lands, (4) forest products, (5) recreation, (6) Wilderness recommendations, and (7) roadless areas (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2004a).

The Forest Service hosted nearly 100 public meetings in 10 different communities around the western part of the state from 2003 to 2004. During this time planning staff were developing management alternatives for the draft EIS. These alternatives were tentatively announced in Fall 2004, including the preferred alternative, which mirrored the planning issues identified in the proposed action in January 2004 (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2004b).

In 2005 the Forest Service chose to switch to the new planning process. Planning staff hosted over 50 additional community-based working group meetings throughout 2005. The proposed forest plans for the Bitterroot, Lolo and Flathead were released in May 2006, for a 90 day public comment period. Like the Uwharrie, the 2005 planning rule was enjoined in federal court before the final WMPZ forest plans could be released.
Figure 6. Bitterroot, Lolo, and Flathead National Forests in Montana. The three forests – along with 8 other national forests and one national park – intermingle with the growing communities in the federally dominated landscape of western Montana and northern Idaho (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2007c).
IX. Results

The following summarizes the results from interviews with participants from the Uwharrie, Mark Twain, and Western Montana Planning Zone National Forests, organized by evaluative framework criterion.

Mark Twain National Forest interview results

I interviewed three participants in the Mark Twain National Forest plan revision process to determine if the 1982 planning rule provides for good public participation. The interview subjects represent the interests of the forest products industry, motorized recreation, and environmental protection. The following results discuss the conclusions about each criterion of the evaluative framework derived from the interview responses.

Criterion 1: Distributive justice – quality and fairness of the outcome

Interview subjects in the Mark Twain process were generally unsatisfied with the plan outcome, with the exception of motorized recreation interests. There was some inconsistent feedback about the outcome of the plan. The motorized recreation group felt they had won a victory by getting the Forest Service to agree to an off-highway vehicle study, while the environmental interest felt that the plan did not even address the off-highway vehicle issue. (The off-highway vehicle study proposal was not technically part of the planning process, but did occur in the same time frame.)

The environmental participant and the forest products participant both disagreed with the plan’s focus on ecological restoration. Neither supported, for different reasons, the Forest Service’s plan for extensive use of prescribed burning to restore the lands to pre-settlement conditions.

“[The Forest Service is] trying to do more prescribed burning to restore certain kinds of habitat they presumed was there originally. There is some disagreement in the environmental community as to how much of that to allow and what goals to pursue there…. They made assumptions about what the natural forest should be.”

“I think [the Forest Service’s] mind was made up when they started the plan that they wanted to do ecological restoration, and they came up with the necessary factors and reasons for doing that, and I think the plan was driven by that throughout the planning process.”
Criterion 2: Procedural justice

2(a): Access/representation

Access to the Mark Twain planning process was largely through written comments. One interview subject felt that the people who were going to be most impacted by the process – individual citizens – were not part of the process.

“…if you look at the population for the 20 counties, there is an insignificant amount of people who commented. I would suspect that a high percentage of comments were not the people in those counties, they are from metro St. Louis or Kansas City.”

However, this participant also admitted that “even if every one of those people got a notice, I’m not sure how many of them would have responded.” Another participant also felt that there was not great access for anyone, but that “the process was biased toward Ozark [local] users.”

2(b): Voice/participation

The structure of the meetings (meeting with individual interest groups at their request) may have contributed to a feeling of unequal voice and unequal access to decisionmaking. One interview subject claimed that “you can’t tell who’s getting their ear more than others.”

One subject claimed that a group submitted a petition to the Forest Service after the official comment period that influenced certain components of the final environmental impact statement.

“There were no comments during the comment period about opening up the areas to [that kind of] use… it was influencing them where it shouldn’t be.”

2(c): Influence

The Mark Twain National Forest plan revision process was not collaborative, which caused interview subjects to feel that the Forest Service did not adequately consider their input. The Forest Service came up with five management alternatives in the draft environmental impact statement, and participants were mostly involved by commenting on those alternatives and
stating which they liked best. Based upon interview results, the Forest Service was operating under a “Consult” model on the spectrum of public participation (Fig. 1).

One interview subject described the plan outcome: “When everything was done and the votes were taken and a plan was decided on…” When asked about this in more detail, s/he explained that it seemed like there was “somewhat of a blueprint of what was likely going to be done, and they wanted a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on which way to go… option A or B… so it did, in some ways, seem like a vote.”

Another interview subject thought the Forest Service “gave lip service” to his/her input, and that “there was very little they changed in the final EIS.” Another subject described the process:

“They had decided what they wanted to do… then constructed alternatives that tweaked each of those differently… They just kept up with that all along. They went with the motion and required steps…When they could have opened up, they didn’t. Where they could have made it more meaningful with useful kinds of meetings, they didn’t.”

Another subject expressed a desire for more collaboration: “They didn’t sit down with me and ask what I think about restoration.”

Interview subjects generally described the meetings during the planning process as informational – a way for the Forest Service to present information on what they were going to do with the planning process, and for the participants to ask questions. This information would help the participants to construct written comments in response to the proposed plan. One subject did not like the open house meeting format, where participants informally approached different Forest Service employees and asked questions about plan components.

“[Open house meetings] were not very useful. They don’t want people assembling as a body and asking questions to Forest Service staff… It’s a way to keep down the level of contention – divide and conquer. You don’t have to confront larger sets of people and explain what it is you are doing.”

Two of the participants who were interviewed had submitted appeals to the plan, and both appeals were reviewed and rejected by then Chief of the Forest Service, Dale Bosworth. One subject felt the Forest Service acted in “bad faith” during the appeals process.
“[The Regional Forester] was trying to play the groups against each other. It was not a terribly productive process.”

Additionally, one subject claimed that the Forest Service began to implement a project based on a component of the plan that was still under negotiation in the appeals process.

2(d): Logic/use of technical information

Interview subjects generally felt that the Forest Service did not address all the relevant scientific information. One subject felt that “the research was lacking.” Another felt that plan was only rational within a narrow frame of reference:

“In that sense their decisions followed from those rationales. But if you broaden the scope of discussion to include a broader set of concerns that should be addressed, then no [the plan was not rational].”

Interview subjects generally did not feel that the technical information was accessible through the planning staff, but felt that “they were available to the extent they could be.” One subject had requested cost information for a certain management activity in the plan, and hadn’t received a response.

“[The technical information] was out there but you probably have to write to get it. They cite all these studies and what not… I’m not much on computer modeling. That kind of information is difficult to get your hands on. If I would have bored in and knocked on their door every day, but how long it would have taken them to come up with that… I don’t know.”

“There were times I would call for specific information. The [regular Forest Service personnel] were better overall than the planning staff. If I talked to someone in the timber program I got decent information from them, but from the planning staff less so. But, they did give me copies of some things when I requested them. Overall, if I had questions about the process or timing, I got those questions answered. As far as substantive stuff, I had to go to staff people in those areas.”
Criterion 3: Other goals of public participation

3(a): Incorporating public values, educating the public, and resolving conflict among competing interests

Very little education went on during this process because there was little interaction between different participants and interest groups. Subjects generally felt that the process did not contribute to resolving conflict among competing interests.

“The conflict level is about the same. It’s virtually impossible to satisfy everyone. There’s always going to be conflict.”

“All of those interests were kept separate, we didn’t interact. If we had full public meetings where people sat down and asked questions and they were answered, then we could hear each other’s concerns. But with the kind of meetings they had, you don’t get that kind of interaction at all. In fact, what that kind of process does is to maintain a certain separation among the various interests... there is no basis for empathy because you don’t hear their point of view or arguments. The process was very deficient in that regard.”

Another interview subject expressed this lost opportunity:

“I am sure there are plenty of people that consider themselves environmentalists that we in the [motorized recreation] community could find common ground with.”

Interview subjects felt that the process helped them to work with other like-minded groups to collaborate during the comment and appeals process, but they generally did not build relationships or coalitions with other interest groups due to a lack of interaction. Subjects indicated that meetings with the Forest Service helped them to understand the planning process, so there was some level of education between the agency and participants.

3(b): Building trust in institutions

The process did not increase the level of trust the subjects had in the Forest Service. One subject indicated s/he “will always be a bit skeptical” of the Forest Service.

“We didn’t go in with great expectations given previous interactions with the forest... We don’t have a sense of participation. We have a sense of them being adversarial.”
“I still think they are a good outfit. But I think their ability to do things has been curtailed by the governmental processes [they] have to go through.”

One subject had negative interactions with other participants during a contentious meeting about the off-highway vehicle study. Although this meeting was not technically part of the plan revision process, the experience caused the participant to further distrust the “extreme” members of this particular interest group.

Conclusion

The results show that subjects’ perceptions of the Mark Twain process were mostly negative. Therefore, the Mark Twain National Forest planning process generally did not provide for good public participation under the 1982 rule.

**Uwharrie National Forest interview results**

I interviewed five participants in the Uwharrie National Forest plan revision process to determine if the 2005 planning rule provides for good public participation. The subjects interviewed represent the interests of the forest products industry, education/research, non-motorized recreation, motorized recreation, environmental protection, and adjacent landowners. The following results discuss the conclusions about each criterion of the evaluative framework derived from the interview responses.

**Criterion 1: Distributive justice – quality and fairness of the outcome**

Interview subjects in the Uwharrie National Forest planning process were satisfied with the plan outcome, with the exception of the non-motorized recreation interest. Although the final plan has not yet been issued, none of the interview subjects plans to submit objections to the plan at this point. One subject felt that “Overall the plan was fair. They tried to provide for everybody they could, and at the same time protect the resources they are charged with protecting.”

The environmental interest thought the plan outcome was well received because “they were able to get a lot of timber off [the forest] by doing things we love,” like ecological
restoration. However, the forest products interest did not necessarily view this as a win-win situation. S/he thought that the Uwharrie should not focus solely on ecological restoration, and should produce more timber, even though “there’s plenty of timber available in the private market” and the timber industry doesn’t view the government as “a reliable timber source.”

One interview subject expressed concerns about the implementation of the plan due to its flexible nature:

“No decisions and makes no concrete limitations on what can happen in the future… We have this great plan vision on the Uwharrie, but [if] political winds change, and [if] we have a different forest ranger who doesn’t agree with it, [that person] has a lot of freedom to put it aside and do what they think is best. I am most distressed about that.”

Criterion 2: Procedural justice
2(a): Access/representation

Participants accessed the Uwharrie planning process through the public meetings in Troy, North Carolina, and through written comments in response to these meetings. The planning staff did not receive any public comments from people who did not participate in the local planning meetings (Ruth Berner, Forest Planner, US Forest Service, personal communication September 5, 2007).

Most interview subjects felt that there was equal access to everyone who had an interest in the forest’s management. However, they did not feel that all these interests chose to participate.

“The local [timber] industry was not there because they have written off the Uwharrie as a timber source.”

“I would have liked to see more people avail themselves of that access. It was advertised, it was open, free to anybody that wanted to participate… I was disappointed in the lack of participation from county residents… I don’t know why, it was at all times of the year… There shouldn’t have been a problem.”

The non-motorized recreation participant felt that the representation, in terms of numbers, was biased toward local use:
“Every meeting was held in Troy on a weekday evening. How many people can get here? Most people who use the forest come from Raleigh, Durham, Winston-Salem, Greensboro, or Charlotte… I talked to a lot of people who would have loved to come to the meetings, but just couldn’t logistically.”

However, s/he still felt that all interests were at least represented through a “good mix of people.”

2(b): Voice/participation

All interview subjects felt that the process afforded an equal voice for all interests and participants. They attributed this to the facilitator’s skills:

“The OHV trail users were better organized and represented… people interested in horse trails were fairly organized and represented… [the Forest Service] didn’t let them dominate, but their numbers were attention getters…. But they didn’t get to dominate any session and run it for their self interest – [the facilitator] was very good at that, listening to all points of view.”

“I would say neither the process or the substance [favored any one stakeholder or interest]. There was a lot of common ground for the Forest Service to work in, and they did a good job of doing that.”

One interview subject also attributed this to “a couple of representatives from each user group that stayed pretty active.”

2(c): Influence

Based on feedback from interview subjects, the Uwharrie planning process most closely approximates “Collaborative” on the public participation spectrum in Figure 1. Interview subjects felt that they, as a group, had ownership of the plan, within the constraints of the agency’s mission and structure.

“I don’t think [the Forest Service was] closed minded about anything.”

“[The Forest Service] asked us for desired conditions and that was pretty much open. They didn’t tell us what to talk about. They always have to go back to feasibility.”
“It was only reasonable that [the Forest Service] had some direction, because they aren’t starting with a blank slate… Let’s face it, they themselves are a political creation and are forced into political decisions from above. They had that, but as best they could, given the direction they are charged with, they tried to accommodate everyone and listen and work that into the planning process.”

However, the collaborative process might have been helped along by the general agreement among participants on the direction of the management plan for the Uwharrie (such as pursuing ecological restoration of longleaf pine ecosystems):

“[The Forest Service] had a vision for the direction the Uwharrie needed to go based on their assessment. That vision was presented as a factual matter, then there was a discussion on whether or not that vision was right, then how to make that [vision] happen. Everyone liked the vision – no one had a problem with it… you can’t say whether or not they would have listened to change because everyone liked it.”

Interview subjects basically felt they were able to directly influence the plan by participating:

“Whatever you wanted in the plan, you had to let [the facilitator] know, and word it in a way that she could get it in there.”

“My participation was influential, not that I moved the world, but I brought points of view and personal management experience… that was listened to and had some influence.”

“I do think some of [my group’s] feedback was reflected in some changes to [objectives and guidelines] in the draft. I thought that was a happy surprise and a good result. That has not been my experience with [national] forest processes in the past.”

However, some subjects felt that there were some aspects to the plan that had been pre-determined and were not up for discussion:

“They – not sure who they are – wanted [the horseback riders to ride only] on the trail. We didn’t get a good reason why, or whose opinion that was, it just got stuck in there. The other stuff it seems [the Forest Service was] open and would include stuff, but on that one specific topic they just shut us down.”
“I can’t prove it, but the Feds are going to do what they want to do… this thing about replacing the loblolly with the longleaf and at what rate had already been made, and it was non-negotiable. It struck me as, ‘well, that’s a major decision’.”

2(d): Logic/use of technical information

Interview subjects were satisfied with the use of, and their access to, technical information that was within the scope of the plan components.

“I had requests for more technical information. I’m kind of sorry I asked for it. I asked for a trail classification… they sent it to me, a big thing… I pulled some good information out of it.”

“It was a thick packet. If you didn’t sit down and read through it… there were a lot of big words that you wouldn’t understand even if you went to college. Generally, it was too technical.”

“There was a lot of important information you couldn’t understand unless you invested some energy because it was complicated… I thought [the Forest Service] did a good job of using [Geographical Information System] analysis. It was a very progressive use of mapping technology … to let land use analysis drive forest planning.”

Interview subjects also responded positively to the use of field trips that got participants out on the ground to discuss trail maintenance and longleaf pine management.

Criterion 3: Other goals of public participation

3(a): Incorporating public values, educating the public, and resolving conflict among competing interests

Stakeholders generally felt that the process helped them to communicate and empathize with other interests. The motorized recreation interest felt that meeting horseback riders and talking about how user conflicts can be dealt with in the plan helped to resolve conflict between these two groups.

“I got to meet a lot of the horse people. Just meeting them and talking to them face to face eased some of the tension. Some of the conflicts, as far as the trails in the same areas, are going to be considered in the future.”
One subject described how the facilitator used colored nametags to get people to mix up and sit at tables with different participants.

“It helped because, instead of the discussion being based on what you were interested in when you got there, you got to see some other viewpoints… you also got more feedback from other groups, a better understanding of the way that everyone has to interact together to have a good plan that everybody can live with. We get along pretty good.”

“You can’t help but learn things when you’re interacting with other people. I listened willingly to what others had to say.”

However, interview subjects are still realistic about stakeholders holding to their positions, especially among what one subject referred to as “radical points of view both ways… in preservation and abuse.” However, s/he interacted with “the more moderate of those positions, [and] we began to talk and communicate.”

3(b): Building trust in institutions

There was mixed feedback on how the process affected interview subjects’ views of the Forest Service. Two subjects felt the process increased their trust in the agency, particularly the local planning staff, because of “their intentions and effort to do the right things” and “they tried very hard to make it a fair process.”

“It doesn’t take long to know [the planning staff has] a keen interest in what they are doing. I came away with that from everybody. It was more than just a job; it was something they wanted to do.”

However, one interview subject said the process decreased his/her trust in the agency because they did not adequately consider his/her input.

Conclusion

Interview subjects’ perceptions of the Uhwarrie planning process were mostly positive. Therefore, the Uwharrie planning process generally provided for good public participation under the 2005 rule. Even the interview subject whose interests were not met generally felt that the process was fair, expressed interest in repeating the process, and highly regarded the facilitator.
“Overall I think [the facilitator] did a good job. I hate to speak negatively of [the process]; I just don’t think we were generally listened to. Not to say I wouldn’t go to any more [planning meetings].”

This indicates that, although participants may not have been completely satisfied with the plan outcome, they saw the process as fair, and felt that their participation impacted the result.

**Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) results**

I interviewed five participants in the Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) forest plan revision process to determine if the 2005 planning rule provides for good public participation. The subjects interviewed represent the interests of the forest products industry, motorized recreation, non-motorized recreation, environmental protection, adjacent landowners, and wildlife management. The following results discuss the conclusions about each criterion of the evaluative framework derived from the interview responses.

**Criterion 1: Distributive justice – quality and fairness of the outcome**

Interview subjects’ satisfaction with the draft forest plans is mixed. Subjects representing both a forest products interest and an environmental interest felt that they “won” in some areas and “lost” in others, particularly regarding designated uses and protections for specific geographic areas.

“It’s taking the same deck of cards and shuffling it and re-passing them out, in my opinion, of the old forest plan designations.”

Most interview subjects were displeased with the structure of the new plans under the 2005 rule, particularly the focus toward desired conditions and away from standards and site-specific environmental analysis. Although they generally felt the process was fair, they felt it was inherently flawed because they did not support the planning outcomes that the process was intended to support.
“The process was flawed, but it wasn’t because people didn’t know about it. I think the comments were made in a vacuum of having any real impact on [the forest]… because the whole thing was not to create goals and objectives.”

One interview subject felt that the resulting plans did not meet his/her interests solely due to the structure of the plan:

“Given the structure they were operating with, the people did an okay job. But I think it’s a lousy format and structure for a forest plan.”

However, one subject thought the 2005 rule was an improvement over the 1982 rule:

“I thought the old rule was extremely confusing to the general public… giving the public five choices… alternatives four and five might be exactly the same except one has 10 acres more than the other one. It was extremely boring to read and difficult to understand, and, I thought, nonsensical.”

Response to the new objection process was also mixed. One interview subject felt that “the appeals process is more effective, if it is used properly [because] it’s part of the NEPA process.” Another subject liked the objection process because it “forces people to be involved and to put objections out there, then [has] a group of folks out there to work through those objections… The appeals process is often a one-way street. It doesn’t involve stakeholders. It should, but the Forest Service often doesn’t engage in that process. This forces them to do that.”

**Criterion 2: Procedural justice**

2(a): Access/representation

Interview subjects generally felt that there was fair access to the process. One subject felt that there were plenty of meetings in the local communities surrounding the national forests. Another subject may have found better access to the Flathead forest plan revision process through an ad-hoc group put together by the Flathead County Commissioners. According to the participant, the Commissioners invited diverse interests to use consensus-based decisionmaking to come up with a set of plan comments for the Flathead National Forest.
“[The Flathead County Commissioners] meetings were good… as far as the Forest Service having their own meetings for the general public, they were poor. They had three open houses… They had maps on the board and presented some of the things they were going to do… they couldn’t go over things in detail… I felt they could have had general, open public forums where people could get up and make comments and present their views and thoughts on [the plan].”

Although they each participated in different forums, subjects felt that there was always a diverse mix of interests in the discussion.

2(b): Voice/participation

Some interview subjects felt that all stakeholders had an equal voice in the process, while others felt that certain interest groups dominated. One subject attributed equal voice to the facilitator of the Missoula Ranger District meetings:

“She ran the meetings… to try and be sure that all interests are heard and somehow extracted.”

“[Participants] broke out into groups with a Forest Service person at each table. If one person tried to dominate, the Forest Service person was good about opening it up. I think everybody had a chance.”

However, one environmental interest felt that the process was biased towards giving local, extractive uses more voice in the process, as well as motorized recreation. The motorized recreation interest, on the other hand, felt that the process favored non-motorized recreation stakeholders. Both felt that the other dominating interest had more representation through higher numbers of participants.

2(c): Influence

Most interview subjects felt it is too early to determine whether or not the Forest Service fully considered their input, because most of their comments were in response to the draft plan, and the final plan had not yet been issued as of November 2007. However, based on participant feedback, the type of public participation in the WMPZ revision process varied from “Consult” to “Inform” on the Public Participation Spectrum (Fig. 1).
Switching from the 1982 planning process to the 2005 planning process may have contributed to a perception that the Forest Service did not involve the public early enough in the process. One interview subject had the impression that the Forest Service came up with the draft plan and then solicited comments on this draft, and was not aware of a scoping process to build the draft plan. Another subject thought that the Forest Service “should have had more public meetings before they started to put the thing together. They put the thing together without any public input.” Another subject felt that the Forest Service, when they dropped the development of the environmental impact statement, created the desired conditions based on their preferred alternative, rather than working with the public to establish desired conditions:

“There were meetings where we could comment on their desired conditions, but [the desired conditions] didn’t change.”

Another interview subject expressed a general skepticism in the ability of the agency to fully consider public input:

“If somebody has an agenda, and how they’d like to see it come out one particular way, I don’t know of any procedure that would force him to change… If you had an interest in this area there were plenty of times to go to the meetings and listen to what they have to say, and stand in front of the microphone, and whine directly, and write letters. But as far as being effective in changing things, [the process is] a list of things they have to go through.”

Two interview subjects felt that the new plan structure under the 2005 rule did not lend itself to full consideration of the issues. They felt that the planning process did not cover the full range of issues, including fire management, wildlife, and water quality.

“We weren’t talking about the range of values that the public lands provide. We were talking about a very narrow range of values in the new process, and it was mostly social…All that was discussed was: who wants to ride your ATVs and where do you want to ride them?”

However, some interview subjects were pleased that the Forest Service was receptive to an overwhelming public interest in a proposed ski development on the border of the Lolo and
Bitterroot National Forests, even though many of the issues and comments were not technically within the scope of the plan revision process. Most interview subjects agreed that the Lolo Peak issue dominated as the main issue during the planning process. This proposal generated a large amount of public interest and comment, representing 1,500 of the 6,000 comments received on the proposed plans for the three national forests (US Department of Agriculture Forest Service 2006c). Subjects generally felt that the Forest Service responded to overwhelming public opposition to the ski area, and strengthened management protections for that area, which would make future plans for ski development inconsistent with the forest plan.

In the WMPZ plan revision, as in the Uwharrie and Mark Twain, there was a tension between consideration of local and national interests. One interview subject felt that in smaller community meetings the Forest Service did not put the plan input through the “screen of other resources values that would have come up in the [environmental impact statement] process.” S/he felt that the planning staff “gave local people the impression that they were going to have ultimate say in the way the lands were going to be managed,” but that “the local vote shouldn’t be weighed with any more consideration than someone who lives outside the area.”

2(d): Logic/use of technical information

One interview subject felt that the amount of technical information was “intimidating and overwhelming… [but] that’s not really a criticism.” In fact, a few subjects expressed a desire for more technical information to inform the discussion and the decisionmaking process.

“The process I was involved in… we requested wildlife maps and they didn’t provide them to us at the next meeting… the old process would have had those things. We had wildlife maps, we talked about ecosystem management, and those are the types of things we were talking about because we were dealing with an [environmental impact statement] process.”

Another subject felt that the Forest Service did not reference the scientific analysis behind the plan:

“Then you are talking soils, silviculture, trees, species, spacing, seral stages… it gets a whole lot more technical than just the planning rule itself. [The Forest Service] didn’t discuss it at all. You really had to go after that information.”
Criterion 3: Other goals of public participation

3(a): Incorporating public values, educating the public, and resolving conflict among competing interests

Overall, interview subjects felt that the process either improved or had no effect on relationships among participants in most geographic areas.

“We had some great discussions with the environmental folks… when you get into the communities where this stuff is really important… the ability to maintain and sustain a rural economy and environment… some very good discussions happen and people were able to respect each other’s perspectives. In Missoula the meetings were not as respectful… and not as good.”

Another interview subject felt that “relationships, and some trust, was able to be built between people who would traditionally not trust each other, timber and environmentalists, [all terrain vehicle] riders and backcountry horsemen. [But] I don’t think it had any impact at all [on levels of conflict], those issues are still left out there unresolved.”

One subject felt that some issues, such as the Lolo Peak ski development and motorized access, are too polarizing, and opinions will not change a great deal; however s/he felt that “there may have been some movement on those issues towards ‘maybe it’s okay to have it here, but not there.’ ”

One interview subject felt that the process in the Bitterroot heightened conflict because of “a long history of animosity between recreationists and environmentalists.” Some subjects, including those with forest products interests and recreation interests, expressed a shared frustration with some local environmental groups who have relied heavily on appeals and lawsuits to influence management decisions. The participant in the Flathead County Commission group commented that one of that group’s goals was to “make it more difficult for [some local environmental groups] to sue the Forest Service, and make it easier for the Forest Service to manage the forest without interference from litigation.”

3(b): Building trust in institutions

Interview subjects generally expressed empathy for the local Forest Service planning staff.
“I get frustrated with the Forest Service, but I also understand the rules they operate under and the pressures they are under by so many different factions and interest groups.”

“There’s two levels: the local level and the DC level. [The process] increases my mistrust of the Forest Service bureaucrats. It actually helped me to trust the local people a little bit more because I feel for the position they are in.”

One interview subject felt that the Forest Service employees “on the ground… are great,” but expressed frustration with changes in management direction and the agency’s inability to implement most management activities, such as immediate fire suppression.

One participant, however, felt that the Forest Service employees on one national forest did not fully embrace the new process:

“Six months into the process was the first time I heard a Forest Service person talk about desired conditions. For some that wanted this to work, they made sure it worked, and for those that didn’t… I don’t know why they switched [to the 2005 process].”

Conclusion

Overall, the quality of the public participation in the WMPZ plan revision process was mixed. Where subjects were involved in more collaborative-type planning activities such as facilitated, interactive meetings, they felt that the process was fairer. When subjects were involved in open-house or informational meetings, they felt that their input was not fully considered by the Forest Service.

X. Discussion and conclusions

The conclusions from these three national forest planning cases are limited in scope. However, because I chose contrasting national forests, and interviewed a diverse set of interests, I can draw some initial conclusions about how public participation might change under the 2005 planning rule.
The new forest plan structure under the 2005 rule may lead to poor public participation

Direct reaction to the 2005 plan structure and process was mixed, especially for those interview subjects who were familiar with both the 1982 and 2005 planning rules. Some subjects, particularly environmental interests, felt that the planning process and plan structure under the 1982 rule, with full environmental analysis, was an overall better way to do forest planning. However, some subjects felt that the 2005 rule made more sense because it focused more on incorporating public values.

The biggest challenge for the Forest Service with public participation under the 2005 rule comes from the new plan structure and the shift away from specific management decisions and standards toward desired conditions and guidelines. Although participants feel adequately involved in the 2005 planning process, they still may feel left out of major parts of the overall decisionmaking for national forest management. The challenge will be to continue to provide for good public participation throughout the implementation of the plan, especially during environmental analysis for individual management projects.

Another challenge lies in the implementation of the new objection process. Overall, the objection process (participants have 30 days to submit an objection before the final plan is signed) will likely be equal to, if not better than, the appeals process (participants have 90 days to submit an appeal to a final forest plan after it is signed). It will potentially prevent the situation on the Mark Twain National Forest where portions of the plan were being implemented on the ground while they were still under negotiation and review. However, the Forest Service should pay close attention to how the objection process is implemented because it is still a vital piece of the public’s participation in the plan revision process. If participants do not feel that the objection process provides for a fair way to reverse bad decisions, then this will negate any good public participation that occurs during the plan revision.

Poor public participation can occur under the 1982 planning rule

The Mark Twain National Forest case indicates that the Forest Service can follow all the laws and regulations mandated by the National Environmental Policy Act, mainly the notice and comment processes, and still leave participants feeling that the process was unfair and inadequate.
Good and poor public participation can occur under the 2005 rule

The case of the Uwharrie National Forest indicates that good public participation can occur under the 2005 rule. Initially, I attributed this good public participation to the overall lack of controversy and conflict in the planning process. However, there were two interview subjects whose interests were not fully met in the resulting forest plan, but still felt that the process was fair and equitable. This indicates, according to Lind and Tyler (1988), that this planning process met the requirements for procedural justice.

The case of the Western Montana Planning Zone (WMPZ) indicates that both good and poor public participation can occur under the 2005 planning rule. Interview subjects felt that some parts of the process were fair, and some were not. I believe it was the switch from the 1982 to the 2005 rule in the middle of the planning process, and not necessarily the 2005 rule itself, that mostly contributed to the perceptions of poor public participation. This switch led to the perception among the interview subjects that the Forest Service had already developed the plan, and did not fully consider participant input. This was the major difference between the Uwharrie process and the WMPZ process, as expressed by this Uwharrie participant:

“[The Forest Service] never gave us a plan they wanted and said ‘here’s our plan, let’s work on it.’ [The participants] built the plan – all our input – the foresters, the landowners, the horse people, the environmental people, everybody was there. We had every opportunity to write in our wants and needs in each area, and they were all taken into account, and that’s what made the plan.”

One subject perceived that Forest Service employees on one of the WMPZ national forests did not embrace the 2005 planning process after the switch. This hindered his/her perception of the process as good and fair. It is not clear what the results would have been had the Forest Service employees embraced the new process. More in-depth interviews and analysis of the planning process for each individual national forest might provide more concrete insight into the mixed feedback for the WMPZ.

Good public participation probably cannot happen without a collaborative process

Another important result from the WMPZ is the correlation between the types of activities that the subjects participated in and their perceptions of the quality of public
participation. For the most part, participants who were involved in collaborative activities felt that the process was fairer than participants who participated in traditional notice and comment processes or informational meetings. This suggests that national forest planning processes using the “Inform” or “Consult” models on the spectrum of public participation in Figure 1 are not likely to provide for good public participation.

Even though more collaborative activities may not have provided a consensus-based outcome, they were better received by participants than informational or consultation activities. In both the Mark Twain and WMPZ processes, interview subjects were keenly perceptive of the difference between collaborative and informational activities. Participants saw their role as providing input on the forest plans, and they did not think informational activities such as open-houses were an adequate forum for achieving this, which led to perceptions of poor public participation.

Therefore, the difference between “good” and “bad” public participation in the three case studies appears to lie mainly in the interview subjects’ perceptions of how much the Forest Service considered their input, and to what extent the subjects influenced the plan outcome. These perceptions depended upon the type of activities the subjects were involved in (collaborative versus informational).

This does not necessarily mean that a collaborative process cannot take place under the 1982 rule, although these three national forest cases suggest that the 2005 rule is a better forum for collaborative processes. I did not examine a truly collaborative process under the 1982 rule, which might provide more insight as to whether or not good public participation can occur with a collaborative process under the 1982 rule, even though it was not required.

Balancing local and non-local, and lay and professional viewpoints will be a challenge to providing good public participation

Another challenge for public participation in future planning processes, one that will not easily be resolved, is balancing the tension between local and non-local participation. This tension was revealed in all three planning processes, and negatively impacted interview subjects’ perceptions of the process as fair and good. Subjects felt that the process was biased toward non-local or local groups, depending upon whether or not they agreed with the non-local or local perspective. This tension will probably always exist because it involves complex questions
about the structure of our democracy. There appears to be a trade-off between a geographically based process that takes advantage of local knowledge, and a process that provides for consideration and influence of national and regional interests. The Forest Service should continue to look for ways to include both perspectives.

A similar challenge revealed in the interview results is balancing professional and lay citizen involvement in the planning process. As one interview subject stated, “The trend is people don’t respond to public meetings or opportunities to respond through public notice. Only after the fact when the decisions are made do they wake up and find out, wait a minute, this is not exactly what we think a public agency ought to be doing.” The 2005 process is shorter and less technical, which lends itself to more lay-citizen involvement. However, there is still a need for adequate technical information to inform decisionmaking. Finding a way to balance these needs will contribute to perceptions of the process as fair and good.

*The public is willing to participate in messy, collaborative planning processes*

Although the Forest Service faces numerous challenges in implementing successful national forest planning processes, my results indicate that participants understand these challenges, and are not only willing, but desire to participate in messy, collaborative planning processes. Many subjects sympathize with the Forest Service with regards to their decreasing budgets, limited ability to fund necessary research and management, need to work with such diverse interests and demands, and constantly changing directives from politically appointed agency employees in Washington, D.C.

The interview results also indicate that good meeting design and facilitation can go a long way towards improving participants’ perceptions of the process. Interview subjects responded very positively to good facilitation and engaged employees. However, they were also highly attuned to negative employee attitudes and poor facilitation. As one subject stated, “Some of the folks on the planning team had such an attitude… [The Forest Service needs] to be more careful about who they hire to work with the public.” Interview subjects also expressed a willingness to interact with, or at least listen to, different viewpoints and interests, although they are also realistic about the role of the planning process in resolving messy forest planning conflicts. The Forest Service should continue to leverage these willing attitudes to improve public participation in forest planning. The results of this analysis indicate that the 2005 planning rule is an
opportunity to institutionalize quality collaborative processes and to provide for good public participation in national forest planning.

**Limitations and future research**

There are some limitations to these results. The conclusions from these three national forest planning cases are limited in scope and cannot be applied universally to all national forest planning under the 1982 and 2005 rules. Also, a more thorough study would interview more planning process participants, including those not representing organized interest groups and people who chose not to participate. Another limitation stems from the incomplete planning processes under the 2005 rule. As the final forest plans for the Uwharrie and WMPZ are issued, participants’ perceptions of fairness could change. For example, if significant changes are made to the plan during a review by the regional or Washington office, this could negatively impact subjects’ perceptions of their ability to influence the plan. Additionally, given more time, it would be helpful to further explore the mixed results of the WMPZ process. Interviewing more subjects, especially with regards to the differences between the individual national forests, might provide clearer results. Finally, an ideal study would have examined a truly collaborative planning process under the 1982 rule. This would help determine whether or not a collaborative process under the 1982 rule can provide for good public participation.

As final plans are issued under the 2005 rule, researchers should continue to look at how public participation might be affected in the implementation of the new rule. As more planning processes are conducted it may even be possible to conduct quantitative studies, which can provide more concrete analysis. In addition to analyzing the overall impacts to public participation under the new rule, future research should also look for common elements of successful planning processes under the 2005 rule. This will help the Forest Service improve the planning process and public participation in national forest management.
XI. References


XII. Appendix: Interview script

“I am a candidate for a Master of Environmental Management and Master of Forestry at Duke University. I am conducting this research as part of my masters project, which is a requirement of the graduate program. The purpose of this study is to examine the type and quality of public participation under old and new national forest planning regulations. If you decide to participate in this study, I will ask you questions about your experience, opinions and perceptions regarding the ________ National Forest plan revision process that you participated in from _____ to ______. The interview will take approximately one hour. Your participation in this interview is voluntary, and you may choose to stop at any time or choose not to answer every question. The information you provide will be used to do a case-study based analysis for my project. The results of my project will be in the form of a report and a formal presentation. I may use direct or indirect quotes from the interview in my paper and presentation. I will not use your name, your organization’s name, or any other identifying information in connection with these quotes, but I may indicate the type of interest group you are associated with (environmental recreation, wood products industry, etc). Only I will have access to the notes from your interview. I will keep the information for the duration of my project, no later than June 2008. Do you have any questions? Would you like to participate?”

[Interview questions from Fig. 2.]

“If you have any questions you can call me at _____ or email at _______. Can you refer me to other people who participated in the planning process that may be interested in being interviewed for this project?”