

Lessons Learned, Innovations, and Best Practices among Early Revision Efforts in Forest Planning: Summary of Interview Findings

Report on Interviews from Summer 2016

By Gwen Ricco (MS student) and Dr. Courtney Schultz, Colorado State University¹

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¹ Please contact Courtney Schultz at courtney.schultz@colostate.edu for more information.

Executive summary

In partnership with the US Forest Service, Colorado State University (CSU) has been investigating how the plan revision process under the 2012 planning rule is proceeding and how to best facilitate organizational learning across the agency. In May 2016 the Forest Service held a meeting in Fort Collins, Colorado to bring together forest planning team members to share experiences and lessons learned during plan revisions under the 2012 planning rule. We helped to plan, facilitate, and document the information shared at this meeting; in June 2016 we produced a report summarizing the presentations and discussions from the planners' meeting.

This subsequent report summarizes our findings from 25 interviews we conducted after the planners' meeting with regional and forest planners from early-adopter and second-round adopter forests to delve deeper into specific topics of interest that we identified with Ecosystem Management and Coordination (EMC). Below we list the key topics we investigated in our interviews and our primary findings under each topic.

Critical activities that need to occur in a pre-assessment phase

According to planners, a well-designed pre-assessment phase provides an opportunity for planning teams to create a more efficient and successful assessment process. This includes:

- Creating a project management plan to help planners understand upcoming staffing needs, prepare contracts, establish timelines and expectations;
- Initiating a strong relationship with the public upfront and creating a public engagement strategy;
- Having the core planning team on board ahead of time in order to establish a shared understanding of the overall plan revision strategy and to ensure that the necessary personnel are available; and
- Readyng and updating data for plan revision.

Identifying innovative approaches and ideas utilized during revision

The 2012 planning rule provides opportunities for regions and forests to consider innovative approaches and ideas in order to meet the requirements and intents of planning. Some innovations that are being utilized across the agency include:

- Inviting the public to open interdisciplinary (ID) team meetings;
- Providing an interactive Living Wiki for public engagement and assessments;
- Hiring a collaboration specialist to be part of the core planning team;
- Conducting a regional science synthesis;
- Performing a bio-regional assessment; and
- Utilizing a question-based approach to and providing executive summaries of assessments.

Examining the design and utility of regional programmatic NEPA trainings

Programmatic NEPA is an important aspect of the 2012 planning rule. Planners understand that plan-level NEPA documents cover much larger areas and timeframes and are often more

qualitative in nature than project-level NEPA analyses. To support planners in writing effective programmatic EISs, the agency can help by:

- Locating current guidance and support to planning teams for the programmatic NEPA process from the regional offices to use across the agency;
- Providing more workshops and NEPA trainings nationally to ensure that guidance is consistent across the national forest system;
- Making current examples of successful programmatic NEPA documents available and easily accessible; and
- Creating templates to help ease the pressure on individual forests to complete programmatic NEPA and make NEPA documents more consistent across forests.

Investigating how knowledge is learned and shared across the agency

Successfully revising and implementing land management plans under the 2012 planning rule requires learning and knowledge sharing across the agency. This can be supported through:

- Utilizing current guidance offered by the agency such as SharePoint sites and monthly early-adopter phone calls;
- Improving peer-to-peer networks within the agency;
- Exploring the value of a formalized mentoring program for new planners by connecting them with planners who are ahead in the process; and
- Prioritizing capture and diffusion of lessons learned.

Summary

We have found that many forests are using innovative approaches to planning under the 2012 rule. Planners feel that although they have experienced challenges, existing and future plan revision efforts will be successful, particularly if the agency captures and diffuses lessons learned. Key steps going forward include:

- Prioritizing and outlining key components of a pre-assessment phase in order to accomplish assessment more efficiently;
- Increasing communication, networks, and mentoring across regions and levels of the agency;
- Providing more planning specific trainings on topics such as programmatic NEPA and offering a plan revision primer;
- Creating greater consistency in guidance across the agency; and
- Formalizing a process to capture lessons learned.

1. Introduction

National forest plan revisions under the 2012 planning rule are underway across the country. The eight early adopter forests include the Sierra, Sequoia, Inyo, Chugach, Cibola, El Yunque, Francis Marion, and Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forests. A number of second-round-adopter forests are also undergoing revision, for a total of 24 forests currently in revision as of September 2016. It is important to capture and share innovations and lessons learned from the forests currently implementing the new planning rule in order to understand how to improve the planning process in the future. The Forest Service Ecosystem Management Coordination (EMC) staff partnered with Colorado State University (CSU) to help with this task.

In May 2016 the Forest Service held a meeting in Fort Collins, Colorado for planners to share experiences and lessons learned during plan revisions under the 2012 planning rule and to identify innovative approaches, best practices, and challenges that planning teams are facing during plan revision. Along with a team of students, we helped plan, facilitate, and record information from the 2016 planners' meeting. In June 2016 we delivered a report to EMC summarizing the presentations and discussions from this meeting.

This second report summarizes findings from interviews we conducted after the planners meeting to dig deeper into key topics. With EMC, we developed focal areas for interviews based on issues of emergent importance at the planners' meeting. These focal areas included:

- Characterizing the critical activities that need to occur in a pre-assessment phase;
- Identifying innovative approaches and ideas utilized during revision;
- Examining the design and utility of regional programmatic NEPA trainings; and
- Investigating how the agency can promote organizational learning through mentoring, capturing and sharing lessons learned, and identifying best practices.

Over the Summer of 2016, we conducted 25 interviews with forest planners and regional planning staff. We identified potential interviewees at the 2016 planner's meeting and based on recommendations from Forest Service staff involved closely with plan revisions. Interviews were recorded and confidential in accordance with CSU's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research. We coded interviews in a systematic fashion, utilizing standard techniques for qualitative data analysis. These interviews also will serve as the basis for a Master's thesis to be completed in Spring 2017. The remainder of this report summarizes our findings.

2. Pre-assessment

Plan revisions include three primary phases: assessment, development of the forest plan, and monitoring during plan implementation. Although a pre-assessment phase is not a required part of the planning process under the 2012 planning rule, most forests have stated that conducting certain activities prior to formal plan revision is necessary in order to complete revisions, and specifically to support the assessment phase. Staff stated that when a region or forest is anticipating beginning plan revision, there are several important activities that need to occur to meet the timelines of the revision process.

Key activities for pre-assessment

According to interviewees, a well-designed pre-assessment phase provides an opportunity for planning teams to create a more efficient and successful assessment process. Forest planners identified in interviews several key activities that are important to begin or complete during a pre-assessment phase in order for the planning team to complete the assessment phase on time. These activities, each of which is discussed in more detail below, included:

- Creating a project management plan to establish timelines and clarify expectations;
- Beginning the public engagement process and developing a public participation strategy;
- Ensuring the core planning team is in place; and
- Preparing and readying the data needed for plan revision (e.g. information for wilderness evaluations and preliminary lists of Species of Conservation Concern (SCCs)).

Project management

According to planners, developing a project management plan prior to beginning formal plan revision increases efficiency and effectiveness of the subsequent phases and helps planning teams better understand upcoming processes. **A project management plan helps planners understand upcoming staffing needs, know when to prepare contracts, determine who needs to be involved and when, establish timelines, and create a public engagement strategy.** Planners also suggested that establishing a filing structure and naming convention, such as abbreviations used, helped create a shared understanding among the team members and made information gathering more organized and accessible.

One challenge planners sometimes faced in developing a project management plan included not fully understanding the time commitment for each process and not allocating enough time for key activities, such as responding to public comments. More generally, according to planners, although it may delay a forest's overall revision schedule, it is important to allot enough time and resources upfront so as not to prolong the process further by having to revise documents later.

Public engagement

The 2012 planning rule emphasizes public engagement and collaboration. According to forest planners at both the regional and forest level, **the pre-assessment phase is critical to initiating a strong relationship with the public and creating a public engagement strategy.** According to interviewees, public engagement strategies establish expectations and timelines of engagement, helping communities understand the revision process by identifying the type of public input needed throughout the process and involvement opportunities during each phase. Planners discussed the importance of helping members of the public understand the time commitment associated with each phase and their overall role in the revision process. Some planners said that the major benefit of beginning this process early is to foster relationships with the communities rather than to merely inform or gather information from them. Specific strategies for achieving this are discussed below on pp. 7-8.

Public engagement during plan revision differs from the level of engagement during project level activities. Therefore, a key aspect of early engagement is helping the public to better understand what is included at a plan-level versus project-level process.

Many early-adopter planning teams stated that staff struggled to understand the meaning of collaboration in the context of the planning rule. Another struggle included determining the forest's existing capacity to implement different levels of public engagement activities.

Core planning team

One key recommendation from planners is to have the core planning team on board ahead of time in order to establish a shared understanding of the overall plan revision strategy and to ensure that the necessary personnel are available. Some planners emphasized the importance of including certain positions and specialists on the core planning team. This included hiring or contracting a collaboration specialist to aid in the development of a public participation strategy and to begin the public engagement process early in the pre-assessment phase. Other important positions to have in place included hiring, detailing, or contracting a writer/editor to create templates ahead of time to optimize efficiency in later phases. If the team is on board and working together early, they can build a project management plan together and agree upon expectations.

A major challenge to this is funding, and often forests said they did not have adequate funding prior to formal plan revision to hire the necessary personnel. Also, planners stated that the hiring process in the agency is a time constraint. Another challenge was high turnover of team members on some planning teams that further slowed down the revision process. Some forests also did not have the resources to have planning teams fully dedicated to the plan revision process.

Data readiness

A key activity for ensuring a successful process is readying the data, according to interviewees. **This involves understanding what data the forest will need, determining if any gaps exist, cleaning up current data, and making sure the data is up-to-date.** Sometimes data will need to come from outside of the agency; this issue should be identified as soon as possible. Planners explained it is important that team can find and access data easily. For instance, planners emphasized the importance of developing a system to store data in one easily-accessible location so that planning team members do not have to spend time searching for the relevant information. Planners acknowledge that agency information is not kept up-to-date consistently, and once a forest is gearing up for plan revision there is often a scramble to update datasets.

At both the regional and forest-level, GIS datasets need to be readied in order to prepare for the upcoming assessment phase. At the regional level, planners found it useful to prepare and update regional datasets. This includes data that are applicable across multiple forests. Regional planners stated that forests can then supplement regional data with more local data when necessary during the assessment phase. According to some regional planners, this regional data includes climate change vulnerability assessments, as well as vegetation, insect, and disease data. At the forest level, some planners stated that determining key ecosystem characteristics upfront and considering how to integrate them with ecosystem services will help to increase efficiency in the assessment phase. Another important dataset at the forest level includes information on infrastructure, such as roads and trails.

Many planners said that beginning other processes prior to formal plan revision saves time during assessment. These processes include wilderness inventory and evaluation, identifying potential wild and scenic river eligibility, timber suitability evaluations, and preliminary development of the SCC list. Planners said that, at the least, planning teams early on should prepare and summarize the methods that will be used for gathering data and making determinations in these processes to share with the public. This helps to increase transparency and allows the public to understand the input that will be needed in the future.

Challenges

Some forests stated that they had had inadequate resources and capacity to complete critical pre-assessment activities prior to receiving funding, and, therefore, had to complete these activities in tandem with the assessment phase. **In essence, it forests said they need funding to do a pre-assessment phase in order to accomplish assessment efficiently; since 2015, the agency has responded to this challenge by providing additional funding for forests to complete these critical activities during the pre-assessment period of revision.**

3. Innovations and lessons learned

The 2012 planning rule provides opportunities for regions and forests to consider innovative approaches and ideas in order to meet the requirements and intents of planning. By taking new approaches to certain topics and issues in plan revision, planners can work to increase the overall effectiveness and success of the plan.

We asked planners about processes or tools they employed during planning that they felt were especially innovative or useful. Some ideas that forests and regions have developed include:

- Inviting the public to open interdisciplinary (ID) team meetings;
- Providing an interactive Living Wiki for public engagement and assessments;
- Hiring collaboration specialists;
- Using detailers and contractors to fill in knowledge gaps;
- Utilizing a question-based approach to assessments;
- Creating executive summaries for assessments;
- Directly relating findings from the assessment with need-for-change statements;
- Conducting a science synthesis;
- Performing a bio-regional assessment; and
- Developing regional revision strategies.

Public engagement innovations

Due to the diversity and differences of publics across the national forest system, regions and forests utilize different approaches to meet the collaborative intent of the rule. **Although meaningful public engagement is viewed as a time-intensive endeavor by many planners, interviewees also felt that effective public engagement helps create less contention throughout plan revision and can lead to more success, because the public feels informed and involved in the decision-making and is more likely to be satisfied with the final plan.**

Many forests worked with the agency's Collaboration Cadre to create a public engagement strategy. This cadre is a network of people who help forests and stakeholders organize for the collaborative process. Planners felt generally satisfied with this group and believed working with the Cadre increased overall success. Alternatively, some forests worked with groups such as the National Forest Foundation or the Colorado Forest Restoration Institute to help build their collaborative processes. **Some planners also highly recommended hiring a collaboration specialist to be part of the core planning team to ensure that this expertise and need is being met and maintained throughout the entirety of plan revision.** Planners emphasized the importance of having the collaboration specialist on board as soon as possible. This person can then build a public engagement strategy and start public engagement early to build and strengthen relationships with the associated communities.

Another innovation, employed by the Nantahala-Pisgah National Forest, is offering open interdisciplinary (ID) team meetings. This allows for increased transparency of Forest Service meetings while also allowing the public to be more informed and involved in the conversations. By being open with information and internal dialogue, and allowing the public to be involved in these steps, forest staff believed they had an increased likelihood of success with plan implementation, because stakeholders were included in the decision-making process. In open ID team meetings, the forest invites certain interested stakeholders to attend, at first as just a member of the audience, and increases that level of involvement until they are participating in the meetings alongside Forest Service ID team staff. On the plan revision website, the forest invites interested individuals to sign up for notifications about these meetings, and the forest requires the public to RSVP to these events. One important factor for stakeholder participation is that the forest asks the public to read background material on topics being discussed to ensure a more productive meeting. Interviewees said this has provided positive results and helped to strengthen relationships and trust between the forest and the community.

Region 5 utilized several innovative approaches to public engagement; one example is their Living Wiki for assessments. This allowed the public to contribute information for the assessment phase. The region put draft chapters of each assessment topic on the website and allowed the public to make edits and additions. The information cited by the public had to be based on science, with sources and citations. Some challenges included the time and capacity needed to maintain the website and reply comments, and that some members of the public participate more than others. Although planners felt that the approach could be improved, they also thought it was useful in allowing the public to engage early and increasing transparency.

Region 5 is also unique in their proximity to urban centers, and the region decided to hold public meetings in urban areas, allowing them to reach audiences that traditionally do not participate in forest planning. Going forward, Region 5 planning team members suggest utilizing a variety of outreach methods and marketing techniques to attract a larger audience. This could include reaching out to universities, using mailing lists of local groups such as the Sierra Club, or advertising a public forum as a chance learn about the Forest Service more generally. **Region 5 also used GIS data in order to identify underserved and underrepresented communities to understand where these groups live and to offer public meetings in these locations.**

Other approaches using webinars to reach a wider audience, creating plan revision websites to allow the public to see the documents being produced and the overall timeline of revision, and sending newsletters to a list-serve to update the public. In order to engage youth, several forests plan to partner with local schools to educate children about the importance of the forest and involve the students in monitoring projects. Although this is not directly beneficial to gathering input for plan revision, it helps build and strengthen relationships between the community and the forest for the long-run. **Interviewees also said these student programs also increase capacity for monitoring projects for later phases of revision and plan implementation.**

Assessment Innovations

Forests across the agency take different approaches to the assessment phase. **One key challenge that planners identified is maintaining focus throughout assessment documents rather than creating highly dense documents.**

The Rio Grande National Forest emphasized creating more focused assessments in order to save time and resources and making these documents more easily understandable to the public. To do this, the forest used a question-based approach to assessments, which included asking the public questions tied directly to the directives. One lesson learned was to increase simplicity of those questions and their accessibility to the public. For the assessment documents, the forest created executive summaries for each of the 15 topics. These synthesized current conditions and trends seen in the assessment documents and translated these findings into a page-long document that summarized the information to be more easily understood by the public.

Some forests suggested tying assessments more clearly and directly to the need-for-change statement. This allows forests to explain how current trends and conditions relate to plan revision and why the current land management plan needs to change to meet desired conditions. Planners stated that this creates a clearer understanding for the public of the purpose and intent of the plan revision process. One challenge is that planners found staff did not understand the content of the current plan and what components needed to change to meet the requirements of the 2012 planning rule or meet new management goals.

Region 5 focused on creating a regional strategy in order to provide background information to inform the assessment phase; this included conducting a science synthesis to meet requirements to access the Best Available Scientific Information. During public meetings through the Sierra Cascade Dialogues, the public identified a need to update the scientific information Sierra Nevada ecosystems. The science synthesis took the previous decade of scientific research on the topics associated with the 15 assessment topics and compiled all the best available peer-reviewed scientific literature for the Sierra Nevada mountain range. The region synthesized this information to draw new conclusions based on social, economic, and, ecological sustainability factors. Regional staff considered this highly successful, and Region 6 will be conducting their own science synthesis to prepare for upcoming plan revisions.

Region 5 also conducted a bioregional assessment for the entire Sierra Nevada mountain range, which identified landscape-based issues that translated across the three forests

undergoing plan revision. The region focused on this bioregional level because these forests are so closely connected and certain issues exist that affect all forests in the area.

Regional coordination approaches

Across the National Forest System, regions approached plan revision differently. Some have regional core planning teams, while others group forests within regions. **Region 5 used a unique approach as they have a core regional planning team and grouped forests together to maximize efficiency and capacity.** This core planning team focused solely on plan revision. Much pre-assessment work was done at a regional level, such as collecting ecosystem data and creating a public engagement strategy. During the NEPA process, a regional EIS was conducted for use by all three forests in plan revision to consolidate resources. This work was then tiered down to the specific forest level. Although much of the same information was used to inform plans, the plans were specific to each individual forest. Planners in Region 5 felt that the core regional planning team increased capacity and efficiency and alleviated the workload on forest planners. This allowed the forest-level planners to continue forest-level duties throughout the plan revision process. One challenge to this approach was that it provided less autonomy to the individual forests and created issues with the public, as there were unique issues and challenges across communities that the public wanted acknowledged.

Other regions provided basic support but relied on core teams at the forest level. This created more forest-specific land management plans focused on a local scale. Some planners said they did not have enough support to manage both plan revision alongside project-level planning needs, as the core planning staff was not fully dedicated to plan revisions.

Some regions had core planning teams that traveled to forests within the region providing increased support to the forest-level core planning teams. This allowed some work to be completed at the regional level while still allowing for forests to address their unique issues.

Detailers and Contractors

Many forests hired detailers and contractors to fill in gaps in specialties or expertise. Some of the specialties associated with plan revision are not necessarily needed on a long-term basis but, rather, during certain phases or for specific processes. **Therefore, hiring detailers or contractors provided this skillset when needed and saved the forest funding that could be allocated elsewhere.** Hiring these individuals also took pressure away from planning team leads and increased capacity of the forest, allowing plan revision to cover more ground and delve deeper into certain topics than would have otherwise been possible.

The Challenge of Innovating

Some planners said they wanted more support from leadership when trying new approaches. Planners described conflicting guidance from leadership to finish plans within an expedited timeframe, while also being thorough and innovative. Also, some planning team members with experience with previous planning rules, according to interviewees, were less inclined to accept innovations or new concepts laid out in the 2012 planning rule.

4. Programmatic NEPA

Forest plan NEPA documents are programmatic rather project-specific. This is challenging, as the experience of most Forest Service staff is writing NEPA documents at the project level. This emerged as a key topic of interest at the planners' meeting. Therefore, in interviews we asked questions about the current guidance or training methods utilized at the regional or forest-level to prepare planning teams to successfully meet programmatic NEPA standards.

What "Programmatic NEPA" means to planners

Some stated that programmatic NEPA means looking at the overall impacts to forest programs, such as investigating the ability of a forest to achieve the objectives or desired conditions set forth in the plan. Some planners stated that the NEPA analysis involved considering whether or not alternatives will allow the forest to achieve desired conditions. **Planners felt that programmatic NEPA involved looking at a broader landscape level and utilized more qualitative data than is generally relied upon for project-level NEPA processes.**

Current guidance

Some regions provide guidance and support to planning teams for the programmatic NEPA process from the regional offices. Both Regions 1 and 3 utilized workshops in order to train staff to conduct a programmatic NEPA analysis. This included educating each forest planning team in the region as they begin to prepare for plan revision. Other regions have utilized these resources, which included products such as PowerPoints, in order to train their own planning teams as well. However, these are not widely or consistently utilized across the agency. Another source of guidance forest planners used to understand programmatic NEPA requirements is the CEQ guidance concerning this topic and conversing with Forest Service staff across forests or regions who have previous planning experience.

Moving forward

Planners suggested several recommendations on future guidance and ideas to improve programmatic NEPA planning. This included:

- Providing workshops and NEPA trainings nationally rather than on a regional or forest basis to ensure that guidance is consistent across the national forest system;
- Making current examples of successful programmatic NEPA documents available and easily accessible; and
- Creating templates to help ease the pressure on individual forests to complete programmatic NEPA and make NEPA documents more consistent across forests.

5. Being a learning organization

Successfully revising and implementing land management plans under the 2012 planning rule will require the agency to exhibit characteristics of a learning organization. This includes strong communication and adaptability in order for the agency to capture knowledge, disseminate that knowledge, and change internal practices to the extent needed to support organizational goals. To investigate how organizational learning is occurring and to understand where more support is needed to meet these goals, we asked interviewees to identify the current guidance they are

utilizing, how knowledge and lessons learned are shared across forests and regions, and challenges that planners have experienced in revision that impede learning and change.

Utility of current guidance and opportunities

Most written guidance comes from the planning rule and the directives. Planners rely on this guidance to understand expectations from the Washington Office. However, although most planners appreciate the guidance provided by the directives, many felt encumbered by the density of this guidance and the amount of requirements in the directives. Planners said there is tension between completing revision efficiently and meeting expectations laid out in the planning directives. Planners found many strategies currently in use to be helpful, including:

- SharePoint sites to share lessons learned, document examples, and guidance;
- Early-adopter calls to share experiences and discuss challenges and innovations; and
- National planners' meetings and workshops to provide a forum to share and capture lessons learned, challenges, and best practices and strengthen networks across the agency.

Improving knowledge sharing and ideas for mentoring

We asked interviewees to describe their level of support from other planners at both the regional and forest levels. We also asked how the agency could better support these connections and ability to share and receive knowledge. Although some planners felt as though they had adequate access to communicate with other planners, the network availability is not consistent across forests. For example, depending on the amount of personal connections a planner has within the agency, some planners do not have the same access to other planning teams across regions.

Building stronger connections between planners and planning team members who have already undergone plan revision phases and those starting out would further increase the diffusion of knowledge across the organization.

Mentoring and peer network opportunities appealed to planners in order to help diffuse information and learning throughout the agency. This might include lists of planners or planning team members with similar job responsibilities and areas of expertise to use as a peer network for advice and support. Some indicated it would be helpful to be part of a cohort of forests (3-4) going through plan revision so they could rely on counterparts on other forests for support along the way. Planners also said increase mentoring could be useful in order to get up to speed, discuss ideas and lessons learned, and understand the expectations of leadership. The following list summarizes ideas from interviewees:

- Increasing communication networks with planners who are ahead in the process and with planners who are in the same phase of revision;
- Promoting peer-to-peer networks by providing a list of individuals who are helpful to talk to in different areas of plan revision and are willing to provide communication and support to those who have questions;
- Connecting planners with mentors who have similar experience; and
- Sending regional planners on visits to other regions to better understand different strategies and approaches.

Capturing lessons learned

Many planners stated that capturing and sharing lessons learned is difficult as it is a time consuming process that takes away from their other planning duties. However, some feel as though it should be made a priority despite the added work efforts as it is important to help forests across regions create more timely and efficient processes. Many planners stated that although they do not have time to write up summaries for themselves about lessons learned, they appreciate events such as the planners meeting and follow-up interviews in order to be able to share their current experiences, challenges, and suggestions.

Suggestions moving forward

In order to understand how the agency can better support future planning processes, planning teams were asked to suggest areas moving forward that could strengthen the diffusion of lessons learned across the agency. These included:

- Targeting early-adopter phone calls to provide helpful examples and topics that forests want to discuss;
- Developing a one-stop-shop planning website for successful planning document examples;
- Increasing involvement across regions in document review by providing a list of Forest Service staff willing and capable of reviewing sections of documents or entire documents;
- Continuing the annual planners' meeting to discuss lessons learned, challenges and best practices in further detail; and
- Developing a training program for planning teams preparing to enter the revision process to better understand the content and requirements of the planning rule and directives.

6. Conclusion

Although forests are experiencing difficulties in completing plan revision within the timeframe, most felt confident that future forests will be able to implement the lessons learned from early adopters and be more successful. In order to create better planning processes across the forest system, communication should increase across the organization both across forests and regions and across leadership levels. Planners want lessons learned and successful examples provided in an easily accessible platform that they can use during revision. According to planners, planning is not a well-understood discipline. Therefore, it is important for the agency to communicate the mission of the land management plans in order to create more successful processes.

As new forests enter revision, it would be helpful to determine to what extent innovations from early-adopters have been utilized and gauge satisfaction with knowledge sharing and any mentoring or peer-networking opportunities. Ultimately forest plans should help the agency be more successful in doing the day-to-day work of managing disturbance, achieving collaborative restoration, supporting sustainable recreation, and providing key ecosystem services. It would be valuable to investigate how forest planning support more efficient planning, management, and decision-making. Some planners also want to engage in a forward-looking process to create strategies for improving forest planning and its utility in the decades to come.