6.0 IMPLEMENTATION POLICY ALTERNATIVES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The department's Forest Resource Plan describes how the department will ensure that the plan and its provisions are implemented consistently and expeditiously. The alternatives for each of the policies are discussed below.

Because this section of the Forest Resource Plan deals with implementation issues only, the policies do not have a significant adverse environmental impact at the present time. The department will review any potential significant environmental impacts from the implementation policies at a later time as part of the ongoing review under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

6.2 DISCUSSION OF IMPLEMENTATION POLICY ALTERNATIVES

Policy No. 35: Public Involvement

The preferred policy states:

The department will solicit comment from the public, tribes and government agencies when implementing the Forest Resource Plan and when revising policies contained in the document.

Three alternatives were considered by the department.

Alternative 1: The department will develop a system for prioritizing policies, and it will solicit public input only on significant public policy issues.

Alternative 2: The department will solicit input from the public and other government agencies only at the initial implementation of the Forest Resource Plan.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would leave to the department's discretion after the adoption of the Forest Resource Plan to decide if and when it wanted to solicit or encourage public involvement on the issues raised in the plan.

Background

The Board of Natural Resources meetings, which are held on the first Tuesday of each month are open to the public. The department now regularly solicits public comment and review on its plans. If an environmental impact checklist is released on a specific activity, public comment is solicited.

The issue underlying this policy, however, is the extent of public involvement that the department should encourage when it comes to implementing or revising the Forest Resource Plan (which will remain in effect between 1992 and 2002).

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

The **preferred policy** encourages the department to actively involve the public in implementing and revising the Forest Resource Plan. The department prefers this alternative because it believes that the public, including tribes and other government agencies, have an interest in the department's major forest policies. The department recognizes that the preferred policy may be more expensive and time consuming than other alternatives.

Alternative 1 is more efficient because it concentrates public involvement on a selected set of policies. The policy, however, may limit public involvement by leaving it up to the department to decide what is important and on what issues the department will seek public review.

Alternative 2 involves the public at the beginning of the implementation process but limits further involvement in policy changes until the Forest Resource Plan expires. This policy represents a major departure from previous department statements, including those in the Strategic Plan, which call for the department to involve the public in ongoing issues and problems. The only advantage of this policy is that it would save time and money by reducing the department's effort in this area.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would leave it up to the department's discretion whether to involve the public in ongoing changes and implementation issues.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant adverse environmental impact at the present time.

Policy No. 36: Implementing the Forest Resource Plan

The preferred policy states:

The department will attempt, within budget constraints, to meet the key elements in each of the policies described in this plan.

Three alternative were considered by the department.

Alternative 1: The department will develop a timely implementation schedule and carry out the plan as allowed by budget.

Alternative 2: The department will develop a timely implementation schedule and provide the necessary budget to carry out the plan.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would allow the department to decide on an ad hoc basis how it to fund and implement the policies contained in the plan.

Background

The department recognizes that timely implementation of the Forest Resource Plan is critical to the public and is important for the department's own employees. The department would prefer to implement the entire plan immediately but such an action requires available funding. Although the department will make every effort to secure adequate funding, the final decision rests with the state Legislature. As a result, budget constraints may prevent the department from implementing immediately the plan's policies.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

The **preferred policy** directs the department to implement key elements of the Forest Resource Plan and delay other portions if budget constraints dictate a need to do so. The department intends to make every effort to seek adequate funding to implement the plan. If adequate funding levels are not appropriated by the Legislature, the department has no choice but to set priorities for funding and implementing the Forest Resource Plan. Under the preferred policy, the department is not tied to an overall schedule regardless of funding levels.

No matter what the level of funding, the department will work for creative solutions to implement the plan efficiently. In so doing, the department will fulfil its legal duties as a trustee, and it will also meet or exceed the requirements of the Forest Practices Act. The department will identify the key elements of each policy to implement first and may delay other elements until funding becomes available.

Alternative 1 would spell out a specific implementation schedule and would commit the department to implement the entire plan. It would not establish priorities. This policy, however, is likely to create expectations that cannot be met; it may cause confusion when the implementation schedule changes because of inadequate funding.

Alternative 2 also creates unrealistic expectations. It makes definite commitments and promises the securement of funds beyond the department's control. Although it sounds appealing on paper and sets a definitive timetable, the department does not believe it can guarantee that funds will be available to implement the Forest Resource Plan in the manner described in this alternative.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would allow the department to deal with the implementation and funding issues as they arose and would entail no commitments on the department's part at the present time.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant adverse environmental impact at the present time.

Policy No. 37: Monitoring the Forest Resource Plan

The preferred policy states:

The department will monitor the Forest Resource Plan's implementation to determine whether its policies are being executed efficiently and to measure the success of the plan in meeting its objectives.

Three alternatives were considered by the department.

Alternative 1: The department will monitor and measure the success of the Forest Resource Plan and provide corrective action and feedback from both internal and external sources.

Alternative 2: The department will measure the success of the Forest Resource Plan in five years and provide corrective action and feedback from both internal and external sources.

Alternative 3, the no-policy alternative, would allow the department to monitor or not monitor compliance with Forest Resource Plan as management saw fit. The department would not commit to make a special effort to monitoring the Forest Resource Plan and its implementation.

Background

The department's experience in monitoring the Forest Land Management Program (1984-1993) suggests the need for clearly-defined procedures to assess whether the adopted policies of the Forest Resource Plan are working in the field.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

The **preferred policy** requires the department to track closely the implementation of the plan and how it is put into practice on the ground. As part of this process, the department will assess employees' understanding of the plan and will identify additional training and education needs. This policy will provide management with the ability to revise portions of the plan to respond to dynamic social, political, technical, and environmental changes and issues.

Alternative 1 commits the department to continuously examining the Forest Resource Plan but may encourage frivolous challenges to prevent implementation. Constant corrective action and feedback from both internal and external sources opens up an opportunity for endless critique and suggested change.

Alternative 2 requires the department to engage in a review at five years, whether the plan needs major revisions or not. The review may take considerable time and may not be cost effective. Changes may be needed before the five-year period expires.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would allow the department to deal with these issues on an ad hoc basis but would require no monitoring or positive effort to ensure the plan is implemented expeditiously.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant, adverse environmental impact at the present time.

Policy No. 38: Modifying the Forest Resource Plan

The preferred policy states:

The department will seek permission from the Board of Natural Resources to modify certain portions of the Forest Resource Plan if changes in law, scientific practice, major public attitudes or new management directions require a different course of action not compatible with the policies contained in the plan.

Two alternatives were considered by the department.

Alternative 1: The department will review the plan at three-year intervals and recommend to the Board of Natural Resources necessary policy changes in light of current issues and knowledge.

Alternative 2, the no-policy option, would not commit the department to undertake any sort of action to modify the plan when changes occur, except those required by law.

Background

State law requires that the Board shall establish policies to ensure that the acquisition, management, and disposition of all lands and resources within the Department's jurisdiction are based on sound principles designed to achieve the maximum effective development and use of such lands and resources consistent with applicable laws. Because the Forest Resource Plan will outline basic department policy, the Board of Natural Resources must approve the document and any subsequent modifications.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

In the **preferred policy**, the Forest Resource Plan remains flexible and dynamic. The department could modify the plan, if necessary, to respond to pressing economic, regulatory or environmental issues.

Alternative 1 provides a predictable timetable for modifying the Forest Resource Plan. It facilitates planning and work schedules and allows staff time to prepare for review. The chief disadvantage is that it is rigid and ties the department to a three-year cycle of review whether it is needed or not.

Alternative 2, the no-policy option, requires the department to revise the plan only when required to do so by law.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant, adverse environmental impact at the present time.

Policy No. 39: Consistency with Other Plans

The preferred policy states:

The department will review its other management and policy plans and will compare those with the Forest Resource Plan. Where policies overlap and where there is apparent conflict in direction, the department will determine precedence and suggest changes to the Board of Natural Resources for resolving these differences.

Three other alternatives were considered.

Alternative 1: The Forest Resource Plan has authority over all existing plans.

Alternative 2: The Forest Resource Plan will not take precedence over other planning and policy documents. Previous management plans will be "grandfathered" in to department policies and will remain in effect, even if they are inconsistent with this Plan.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would leave it to the department's discretion to evaluate the Forest Resource Plan and any conflicts with other documents.

Background

In addition to the 2.1 million acres of state forest land that are covered by this plan, the department manages almost 3 million acres of additional nonforest lands. Management decisions on nonforest properties potentially conflict with state forest issues and problems. Some inconsistencies between the Forest Resource Plan and other documents, policies and guidelines are inevitable and will need resolution.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

The **preferred policy** commits the department to identify and eliminate policy conflicts and provide continuity between the Forest Resource Plan and other department documents. The department will invite comments from the public and other agencies before changing existing plans or making a decision to change the Forest Resource Plan. Specifically, the department intends to contact the original participants who reviewed prior plans and solicit their comments on changes in these documents to ensure that the public is fully informed about the new policies adopted in the Forest Resource Plan.

Alternative 1 does not recognize that areas of responsibility in land management overlap. Prior plans have dealt with some if not many of the issues addressed in the Forest Resource Plan. Because the department believes it would not be responsible to simply override commitments made in previous plans without careful review of the consequences, this alternative was not adopted.

Alternative 2 does not allow the Forest Resource Plan and its policies to supersede existing plans. If adopted, this alternative would cause inconsistencies in statewide policy by allowing the department to have different sets of policies for different locations.

Alternative 3, the no-policy option, would allow the department to evaluate the plan for consistency with other documents. It could make ad hoc decisions concerning which document had precedence. The Board of Natural Resources would probably not be involved in these decisions.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant, adverse environmental impact at the present time.

Policy No. 40: Research

The preferred policy states:

The department will conduct applied research to monitor and evaluate silvicultural activities, test current practices and, where appropriate, initiate a process for change. The research will focus on issues relating to protection and conservation as well as forest production. (current policy)

Four alternatives were considered by the department.

Alternative 1: The department will conduct and support cooperative and applied research to increase the value of products from forest land.

Alternative 2: The department will conduct applied research that is focused on evaluating and improving the policies, management activities and implementation of the Forest Resource Plan.

Alternative 3: The department will conduct applied research and monitoring as driven by current issues and short-term management objectives.

Alternative 4, the no-policy option, would not set any priorities for department research.

Background

The department's research budget is slightly in excess of $1 million per year. Some research is conducted by department personnel. Other research is conducted by cooperatives of which the department is a part. The department participates in these efforts and shares in the resulting scientific information.

Comparison of Alternatives and Environmental Impacts

The **preferred policy** requires the department to practice state-of-the art forest resource management and react quickly to changes in technology and economics. As new methods of forestry are developed and tested, the department will consider and propose appropriate changes in its procedures and policies. Under this policy, the department will conduct and support applied research to increase the value of products from forest land; it will also work to solve major protection and conservation issues. This research may provide a body of scientific information to modify current department practices or may suggest the adoption of new methods and procedures.

Most of the alternatives are more limited in scope and would restrict the amount of research the department could undertake in the coming decade. Alternative 1, for instance, would require the department to conduct research only to increase the value of wood products from state forest land. Alternative 2 would require the department to conduct research that only evaluates the policies of the plan. Alternative 3 would require the department to conduct research on short-term issues (for example, three to five years from now) but would exclude long-term research projects that could affect the department in the 2000s. Alternative 4, the no-policy option, would allow the department not to conduct any research.

In contrast with these alternatives, the **preferred policy** allows the department to examine a variety of long-term research subjects, including timber protection and conservation issues. The department believes this policy will benefit the trusts in the coming decade.

The preferred policy and alternatives do not create a significant, adverse environmental impact at the present time.