USDA Forest Service
Natural Resource Manager

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Topic: Natural Resource Manager (NRM) Air and the Air Quality Portal support Land Management Planning

Summary: Land management plans provide the basis for management decisions made on national forests. The 2012 Planning Rule requires national forests and grasslands to assess air quality and include relevant standards and guidelines to maintain or restore air quality in land management plans. The Forest Service Air Resource Management (ARM) program has developed a decision support system to help forests conduct this assessment and consider air quality components for integration in their plans. The Air Quality Portal for Land Management Planning provides national forests and grasslands a standardized, step-by-step assessment method that incorporates the best available science and data. A key component of the assessment is evaluating whether Forest Service lands have exceeded critical loads, thresholds of air pollution above which harmful effects to sensitive ecosystem resources begin to occur. The ARM program worked with EPA to produce national aquatic and terrestrial critical loads using data collected by the ARM program and managed in NRM Air.

In addition to providing the water chemistry data used to produce the aquatic critical loads, NRM Air also supports land management planning by providing spatial emissions data, including Clean Air Act Class I area boundaries, nonattainment areas, and air quality standards and thresholds. NRM Air is designed for tracking projects and emissions from on and off-forest air pollution sources. NRM Air is partnering with the ARM program to efficiently update spatial data on the portal when new information is available.

Key Points: Currently, the Air Quality Portal hosts information on how to assess critical loads of air pollution for land management planning under the 2012 Planning Rule. In time, the portal will incorporate all aspects of air quality assessment for land management planning. This web portal is an easy-to-use resource to guide national forests through assessing and treating air quality in land management planning. NRM Air provides the data and tools that support the Air Quality Portal.

Key Features:

The Air Quality Portal hosts:

- A step-by-step decision tree guiding a nationally standardized air quality assessment process to determine exceedances of critical loads of air pollution
- Decision trees guiding monitoring and management decisions based on the results of the air quality assessment
- Detailed protocols/instructions for following assessment process
- Spatial critical loads and exceedance layers providing the initial analysis for forests
- Sample specialist report(s)
- Briefing papers and other communications tools
- Training tools