

GAO

Fact Sheet for the Chairman, Committee  
on Energy and Natural Resources  
United States Senate

October 1986

# LAND MANAGEMENT

## Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and Clearwater National Forests in Idaho

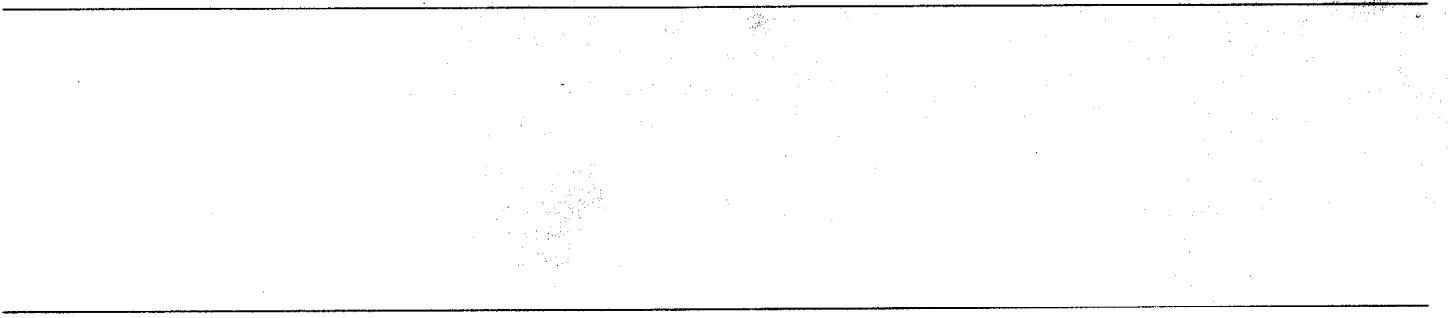


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Resources, Community, and  
Economic Development Division

B-224944

October 31, 1986

The Honorable James A. McClure  
Chairman, Committee on Energy and  
Natural Resources  
United States Senate

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As requested in your January 22, 1986, letter and in subsequent discussions with your office, this fact sheet presents information on the cost of forest planning for the five most recent fiscal years (1981 through 1985) for the Boise and Clearwater National Forests in Idaho. As requested, we also allocated such costs to the pertinent federal laws and regulations governing the forest planning process.

The Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974, as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA), requires the Secretary of Agriculture to develop an integrated land and resource management plan for each administrative unit of the national forest system. Plans for the national forest units are in various stages of development. Of the 123 plans to be developed under NFMA, the Forest Service has made 55 plans final, has published 44 draft plans that are awaiting resolution of public comments, and is currently developing the remaining 24 plans. The draft plan for the Clearwater National Forest was published in May 1985 and is now being revised on the basis of public comments. It is scheduled for completion by the end of 1986. As of September 15, 1986, the draft plan for the Boise National Forest was still under development.

Because the Forest Service's accounting system does not portray the actual costs to develop forest plans, we developed an estimate of such costs in conjunction with the Forest Service. We relied on basic data, such as estimated staff-day expenditures and wage rates, provided by the Forest Service. Our estimate, expressed in terms of constant 1985 dollars, is solely for the development of the forest plan and does not include other types of project planning in the forest, such as planning costs pertaining to an individual timber sale or road network. Of the \$82.2 million spent by the Boise National Forest during the past five fiscal years, we estimated that the forest used \$2.5 million, or about 3 percent, in developing its forest plan. In comparison, of the \$93.7 million spent by the Clearwater National Forest during the same period, the

forest used about \$2.1 million, or about 2.3 percent, in developing its forest plan.

Similarly, because Forest Service records do not identify planning costs by applicable laws and planning process regulations, we relied on the judgment of each forest's land management planning staff in developing these breakdowns of forest planning costs for us. The breakdowns show that most forest planning costs were attributable to two acts—NFMA and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The Boise and the Clearwater National Forest staffs estimated that 75 percent and 86 percent, respectively, of its planning costs were attributable to these two acts. The various cost breakdowns are presented in greater detail in the two sections that follow.

We discussed the facts presented with cognizant Forest Service officials and incorporated their comments where appropriate. As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this fact sheet until 10 days from the date of this letter. At that time we will send copies to the Secretary of Agriculture, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties. Copies will be available to others upon request. Should you need further information, please contact me at 275-5138.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brian P. Crowley". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Brian P. Crowley  
Senior Associate Director



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**Abbreviations**

GAO	General Accounting Office
NFMA	National Forest Management Act of 1976
RCED	Resources, Community, and Economic Development Division

# Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and Clearwater National Forests

The prime responsibility for developing forest plans at the Boise and Clearwater National Forests rests with the land management planning units. These units include staff with skills in such areas as computer systems, writing, editing, system analysis, and economics. In developing the plan, the unit relies heavily on the interdisciplinary skills of staff in other organizational units for expertise in such areas as wildlife biology, archeology, geology, timber planning, and fish biology. The cost of planning is thus not limited to the cost of the land management planning unit alone.

The Forest Service accounting system does not portray the actual total cost of preparing the forest land management plans because the forest planning element of the system (1) does not include the cost of staff outside the land management planning unit who are directly involved in developing the plan and (2) includes the cost of some land management planning staff who perform non-forest plan activities.

In the absence of a record of total forest planning costs at the two forests, we developed an estimate in conjunction with the Forest Service. We requested Forest Service officials at the forest, region, and headquarters levels to (1) identify all staff who participated in developing forest plans for fiscal years 1981 through 1985 and (2) estimate the number of staff days each member spent on forest planning. We requested that the forest level estimate include all time spent in activities related to forest planning, such as gathering and analyzing data, performing studies, attending meetings, drafting the plan, and responding to review comments. We requested, at the regional and headquarters levels, an estimate of land management planning unit and other staff time devoted to the Boise and Clearwater plans. The Forest Service's estimate was to include all staff days devoted to providing direct assistance in developing these two plans, as well as staff days spent in reviewing and approving the plans. We also obtained an estimate at the regional and headquarters levels of staff time devoted to forest planning activities not directly related to any one forest plan, such as time spent developing national or regional guidelines. We then used these time estimates, along with agency expenditure reports, to estimate the cost of developing the forest plans. Our estimates include not only salary costs but also costs for such items as supplies, rent, computers, and utilities. For comparative purposes, we converted our estimates to 1985 base year dollars (constant dollars) by using the Employment Cost Index, as reported by the Department of Labor.



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**Section 1**  
**Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and**  
**Clearwater National Forests**

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We estimate that of the \$82.2 million spent by the Boise National Forest during the past five fiscal years, the forest used \$2.5 million (about 3 percent) in developing its forest plan. In comparison, of the \$93.7 million spent by the Clearwater National Forest during the same period, the forest used about \$2.1 million (about 2.3 percent) in developing its plan. The difference in the cost of planning between the two forests is due, in part, to the fact that the two plans are in different stages of development. The draft plan for Clearwater was published in May 1985 and is now being revised on the basis of public comments. It is scheduled for completion by the end of 1986. As of September 15, 1986, Boise was still in the very labor-intensive process of developing its plan.

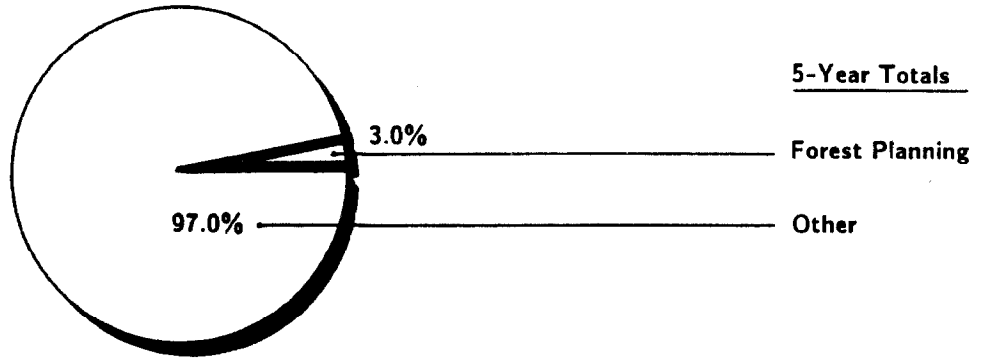
In addition to forest-level planning costs, the Forest Service's regional and headquarters offices also incur costs that are both directly and indirectly associated with the development of forest plans. If these are included, the cost to develop the Boise plan increases from \$2.5 million to \$2.8 million. For the Clearwater plan, the inclusion of regional and headquarters costs increases the total from \$2.1 million to \$2.3 million.

We discussed our methodology for estimating forest planning costs with Forest Service officials at each forest and regional office as well as at headquarters. All agreed that our methodology was sound and felt that our estimate of planning costs for each forest was reasonable.

The following series of figures provides detailed information on the overall management costs and the forest, regional, and headquarters planning costs for each of the forests.

Section 1  
 Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and  
 Clearwater National Forests

Figure 1.1: Estimated Costs to Develop  
 the Forest Plan at the Forest Level,  
 Boise National Forest, Fiscal Years  
 1981-85

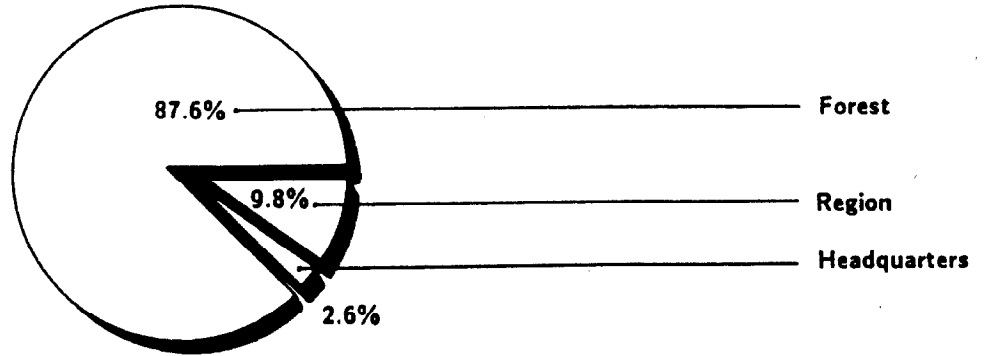


Fiscal year	Total operating costs	Forest planning costs
1981	\$21,167,351	\$ 425,029
1982	14,847,311	555,164
1983	16,690,605	435,419
1984	14,592,661	474,609
1985	14,867,876	570,723
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$82,165,804</b>	<b>\$2,460,944</b>

Note: These forest planning costs are for the Boise National Forest only. See figure 1.2 for an estimate that includes costs at regional and headquarters levels.

Section 1  
 Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and  
 Clearwater National Forests

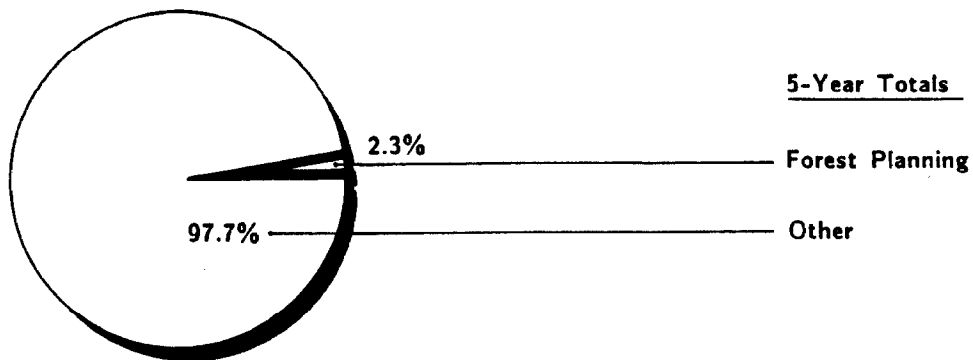
Figure 1.2: Total Estimated Costs to  
 Develop the Forest Plan for Boise  
 National Forest, Fiscal Years 1981-85



Fiscal Year	Forest	Region	Headquarters	Total
1981	\$ 425,029	\$ 58,807	\$13,934	\$ 497,770
1982	555,164	69,279	17,155	641,598
1983	435,419	66,916	13,458	515,793
1984	474,609	39,742	9,735	524,086
1985	570,723	40,209	18,421	629,353
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,460,944</b>	<b>\$274,953</b>	<b>\$72,703</b>	<b>\$2,808,600</b>

Section 1  
 Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and  
 Clearwater National Forests

**Figure 1.3: Estimated Costs to Develop the Forest Plan at the Forest Level, Clearwater National Forest, Fiscal Years 1981-85**

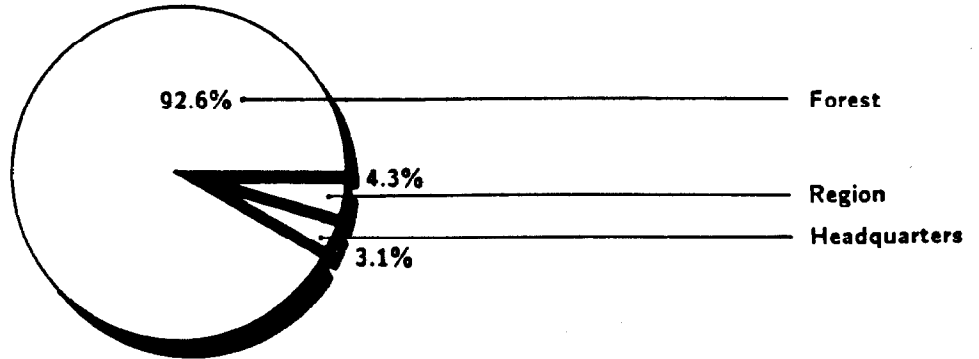


Fiscal year	Total operating costs	Forest planning costs
1981	\$21,231,021	\$ 419,723
1982	18,867,288	565,791
1983	20,488,443	433,238
1984	15,376,575	348,628
1985	17,741,062	376,642
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$93,704,389</b>	<b>\$2,144,022</b>

**Note:** These forest planning costs are for the Clearwater National Forest only. See figure 1.4 for an estimate that includes costs at regional and headquarters levels.

Section 1  
 Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and  
 Clearwater National Forests

Figure 1.4: Total Estimated Costs to  
 Develop the Forest Plan for Clearwater  
 National Forest, Fiscal Years 1981-85



Fiscal Year	Forest	Region	Headquarters	Total
1981	\$ 419,723	\$29,051	\$13,934	\$ 462,708
1982	565,791	22,952	17,155	605,898
1983	433,238	17,105	13,458	463,801
1984	348,628	18,146	12,895	379,669
1985	376,642	11,682	14,475	402,799
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,144,022</b>	<b>\$98,936</b>	<b>\$71,917</b>	<b>\$2,314,875</b>

# Estimated Forest Planning Costs at the Boise and Clearwater National Forests Attributable to Laws and Regulations

The regulations developed by the Forest Service to implement the requirements of NFMA first became effective on September 17, 1979. They have been revised twice since then, once in September 1982 and again in October 1983. A Forest Service project undertaken concurrently with the development of NFMA regulations identified 77 different federal laws affecting the land management planning functions of the Forest Service. The regulations themselves are voluminous, describing general procedures that must be followed as well as the minimum requirements for integrating individual forest resource planning into the forest plans. The regulations also refer to many federal laws and how they affect the planning process.

As was the case with the total cost of forest planning, Forest Service financial records did not identify forest planning costs by the various laws and regulations. We therefore relied on the judgment of each forest's land management planning staff in estimating the percentage of forest planning costs applicable to the various federal laws and regulations.

We used the same forest planning cost estimates to develop a breakdown of planning costs in two different ways—one by applicable laws and the other by planning process actions outlined in agency regulations. To develop an estimate of forest planning costs attributable to individual federal laws, we first provided the land management planning staff with a list of 41 laws identified by the Congressional Research Service as laws relating to Forest Service planning (see table 2.1). The staff then estimated the percentage of forest planning costs spent on each of these laws. The breakdown developed by the staff at each forest showed that most forest planning costs are attributable to two acts—the National Forest Management Act of 1976 and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The Boise National Forest staff estimated that 75 percent of its planning costs were attributable to these two acts; the Clearwater National Forest staff estimated that 86 percent of its costs were attributable to the acts. They both attributed the remaining forest planning costs to the other applicable laws. Figures 2.1 and 2.2 summarize the staff estimates of forest planning costs by applicable federal law.

To estimate planning costs attributable to forest planning process regulations, the land management planning staff agreed to allocate forest planning costs to the 10 general requirements or actions that must be included in the preparation of a forest plan. Tables 2.2 and 2.3 summarize the staff estimates of forest planning costs by these planning process actions.

Section 2  
Estimated Forest Planning Costs at the Boise  
and Clearwater National Forests Attributable  
to Laws and Regulations

Table 2.1: Federal Laws Relating to  
Forest Service Planning

General Mining Laws of 1866 and 1872  
Creative Act of 1891  
Forest Management Acts of 1897, 1899, and 1901  
Antiquities Act of 1906  
Twenty-Five Percent Fund (Act of May 23, 1908)  
Weeks Law of 1911  
Roads and Trails Fund (Act of March 4, 1913)  
Deposits From Brush Disposal (Act of August 11, 1916)  
Minerals Lands Leasing Act of 1920  
Clarke-McNary Act of 1924  
Knutson-Vandenberg Act of 1930  
Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act of 1935  
Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937  
Sustained Yield Forest Management Act of 1944  
Materials Disposal Act of 1947, as amended 1955  
Mineral Leasing Act for Acquired Lands (1947)  
National Forest Reforestation and Revegetation Act of 1949  
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act of 1958  
Multiple-Use Sustained Yield Act of 1960  
Wilderness Act of 1964  
National Forest Service Roads and Trails Act of 1964  
National Historic Preservation Act of 1966  
National Trails System Act of 1968  
Department of Transportation Act of 1968  
Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968  
National Environmental Policy Act of 1969  
Clean Air Act of 1970  
Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burro Act of 1971  
Coastal Zone Management Act of 1972  
Endangered Species Act of 1973  
National Forest Transportation Systems Act of 1974  
Sikes Act, as amended 1974  
Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974  
Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974  
Federal Coal Leasing Amendments Act of 1975  
National Forest Management Act of 1976  
Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976  
Clean Water Act of 1977  
Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977  
Public Rangelands Improvements Act of 1978  
Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979  
Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980  
Federal Timber Contract Modification Act of 1984

Section 2  
 Estimated Forest Planning Costs at the Boise  
 and Clearwater National Forests Attributable  
 to Laws and Regulations

Figure 2.1: Estimated Forest Planning Costs Attributable to Specific Laws, Fiscal Years 1981-85 Boise National Forest

**Total Estimated Forest Planning Costs--\$2,460,944**

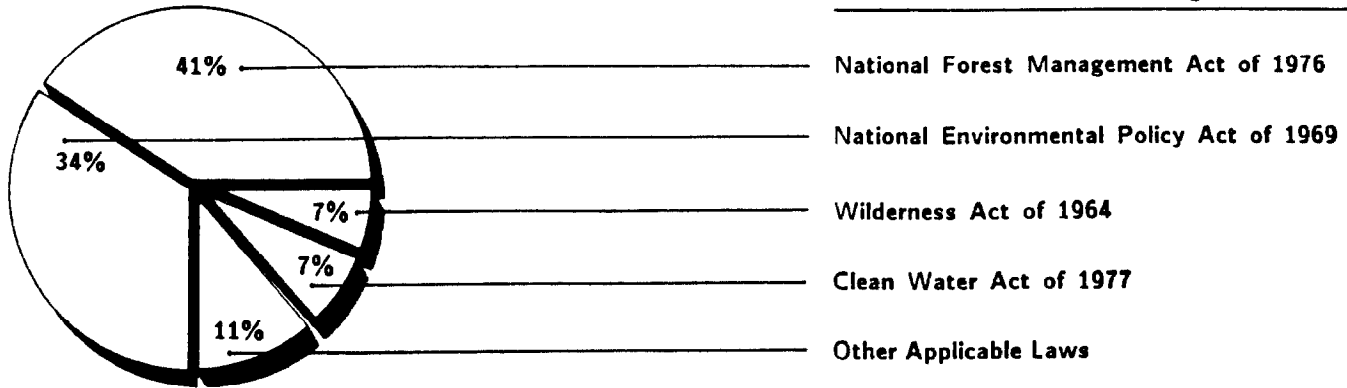


Table 2.2: Allocation of Forest Planning Costs by Planning Process Actions Outlined in Regulations, Fiscal Years 1981-85 Boise National Forest

Action	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	Total
<b>Identification of purpose and need<sup>a</sup></b>						
Preparation of criteria to guide planning	\$ 42,503	\$ 27,758	\$ 43,542	\$	\$	\$ 113,803
Inventory data and information collection	382,526	138,791	304,793			826,110
Analysis of management situation		388,615	65,312	47,461	28,536	529,924
Formulation of alternatives			21,771	118,652	28,536	168,959
Estimation of effects of alternatives				284,765	228,289	513,054
Evaluation of alternatives				23,730	114,145	137,875
Recommendation of preferred alternatives					171,217	171,217
<b>Approval of plan</b>						
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$425,029</b>	<b>\$555,164</b>	<b>\$435,419</b>	<b>\$474,609</b>	<b>\$570,723</b>	<b>\$2,460,944</b>

Notes: Columns may not add because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>All costs for this action occurred prior to fiscal year 1981.



Section 2  
 Estimated Forest Planning Costs at the Boise  
 and Clearwater National Forests Attributable  
 to Laws and Regulations

Figure 2.2: Estimated Forest Planning Costs Attributable to Specific Laws, Fiscal Years 1981-85 Clearwater National Forest

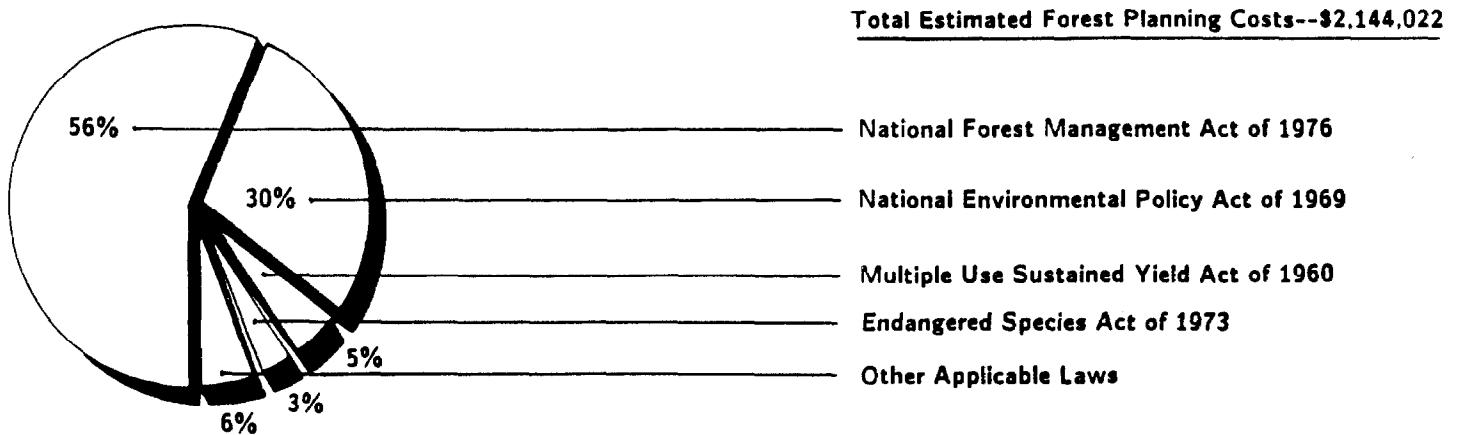


Table 2.3: Allocation of Forest Planning Costs by Planning Process Actions Outlined in Regulations, Fiscal Years 1981-85 Clearwater National Forest

Action	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	Total
<b>Identification of purpose and need <sup>a</sup></b>						
Preparation of criteria to guide planning	\$ 41,972	\$ 56,579	\$	\$	\$	\$ 98,551
Inventory data and information collection	251,834	113,158	86,648			451,640
Analysis of management situation	125,917	226,316	259,943	17,431		629,607
Formulation of alternatives		169,737	86,648	122,020	75,328	453,733
Estimation of effects of alternatives				87,157	94,161	181,318
Evaluation of alternatives				87,157	94,161	181,318
Recommendation of preferred alternatives				34,862	112,993	147,855
<b>Approval of plan</b>						
<b>Monitoring and evaluation</b>						
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$419,723</b>	<b>\$565,791</b>	<b>\$433,238</b>	<b>\$348,628</b>	<b>\$376,642</b>	<b>\$2,144,022</b>

Notes: Columns may not add because of rounding.

<sup>a</sup>All costs for this action occurred prior to fiscal year 1981.



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