



Forest Service Final Rule Shortens Public Comment Periods and Rewrites the Objection Process for National Forest Projects, Effective November 12

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USDA has issued a final rule amending the Forest Service's project-level objection regulations at 36 CFR part 218, shortening minimum comment periods to 15 days for environmental assessments and 30 days for environmental impact statements. It is scheduled for the October 13, 2026 Federal Register and takes effect November 12, 2026.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has issued a final rule amending the Forest Service's Project-Level Predecisional Administrative Review Process at 36 CFR part 218 (RIN 0596-AD69; FR Doc. 2026-20890). The rule is on public inspection and scheduled for the Federal Register on October 13, 2026 (91 FR 64760). It takes effect November 12, 2026.

Part 218 is the process the public uses to file objections to proposed projects that implement land management plans on national forest and grassland units, such as timber sales, fuel reduction and restoration projects documented with a decision notice or record of decision.

What changes

- Shorter minimum comment periods. The prior minimums were 30 days for environmental assessments (EAs) and 45 days for environmental impact statements (EISs). USDA had proposed 10 and 20 days. After public comment, the final rule sets 15 days for EAs and 30 days for EISs.
- Weekend and holiday rule. If a comment or objection period ends on a weekend or federal holiday, it extends to the end of the next business day.

- Faster, consolidated review. USDA says the rule "reduces these time periods and clarifies how objections are reviewed," and the comment summary describes page limits, consolidated review responsibilities, modernized public notice and eliminating the separate reviewing officer role.
- NEPA alignment. USDA says the update aligns part 218 with the rescission of CEQ's NEPA regulations (effective April 11, 2025), USDA's revised NEPA procedures at 7 CFR part 1b, and the rescission of the Forest Service NEPA rules at 36 CFR 220.

What the public said

USDA reports about 2,270 comments on the February 6, 2026 proposed rule (91 FR 5387), about half unique, from 129 organizations including eight Tribal governments, sixteen state governments and seven local governments. Many commenters said the changes would reduce meaningful public participation; others supported a faster process, citing effects of long reviews on forest health treatments and local economies.

Which projects are affected

Projects that published their legal notice for comment before February 6, 2026 stay under the old rule for the whole review. USDA's transition guidance sets separate treatment for projects noticed between February 6 and the effective date.

Source

- Federal Register, FR Doc. 2026-20890 (USDA Forest Service, final rule, 36 CFR part 218). Contact: Joshua White, Acting Director, Ecosystem Management Coordination, 202-205-0650.

Notes

- Author: Ryan Standley / Record of Sale, LLC / Notice Nearby.
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