

Objective

OBJECTIVE CASE STUDY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, FOREST SERVICE



ORGANISATION

U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service

INDUSTRY

Public Sector

BENEFITS AT A GLANCE

- Efficient remote working
- Enhanced team collaboration
- Expedited content creation
- Reduction in formatting and publishing
- Improved citizen and stakeholder engagement

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California's Sequoia National Forest implements new solutions to improve the production of the Giant Sequoia National Monument Management Plan and to promote transparency and collaboration with citizens and stakeholders.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service - established in 1905 to administer public forest reserves in the United States - is the largest forestry research organisation in the world today. The mission of the Forest Service is caring for the land and serving people.

The Forest Service accomplishes its mission through two major areas: management of the national forest system and forestry assistance to states and private landowners.

The Forest Service manages a vast public land base of 193 million acres that encompass 155 national forests and 20

national grasslands across the country. The agency also provides technical and financial assistance to states, tribes, communities, private landowners, and resource managers through its State and Private Forestry program.

The Sequoia National Forest, one of 18 national forests in California, is famous for its giant sequoia trees. The Forest is a complex landscape with five unique ecosystems converging on 1.2 million acres in the southern Sierra Nevada. The Sequoia goes from an elevation of 2,000 feet (desert-chaparral) to 10,000 feet (red fir ecosystem).

There are 33 giant sequoia groves on the Sequoia National Forest. The giant sequoia tree, one of the largest trees in the world and some are up to 24 feet in circumference, is a national icon and was extended additional protections in 2000 when the Giant Sequoia National Monument was proclaimed by President William Jefferson Clinton.

“ It’s a **great advantage** to enable numerous writers from many different locations to **work collaboratively** online, **significantly reducing** review and revision time.”

Ms Tina Terrell

Forest Supervisor,
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service



The proclamation of the monument was controversial then and is still today. How do you manage a national icon that is natural and can burn and still place fire on the ecosystem? That is the question of the day. The Sequoia National Forest is often challenged to make tough decisions about how to protect the environment while considering various activities on the natural landscape such as road or trail building, burning forest vegetation, or developing recreational sites.

To address these challenges in a collaborative and transparent manner, the Forest Service considers the environmental impacts of proposed actions and reasonable alternatives to those actions by developing either an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA), as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969. An EIS or an EA integrate environmental values and potential impacts to enable informed decisions to be made about proposed activities.

The U.S. public plays an important role in the NEPA process. During the initial “scoping” period, people can provide input on what issues should be addressed in an EIS or an EA. During the formal comment period after an EIS or EA is published, people weigh in on the agency’s findings. Citizens can also attend public meetings or forums, where they submit verbal or written comments for consideration by the lead agency. Under certain circumstances, citizens or organisations can appeal Forest Service decisions.

DEVELOPING A BLUEPRINT FOR A LASTING LEGACY

The process laid out above sometimes does not lend itself to a collaborative, facilitative, and transparent process. The Sequoia National Forest decided to do something different to prepare a management plan for the Giant Sequoia National Monument. In 2009, the Forest began redevelopment of the new Management Plan following a court order that remanded the first plan created

some four years earlier. The focus of the new plan is to ensure the protection and restoration of the giant sequoia trees and ecosystems, while also providing public benefits such as recreation.

To avoid repeating previous mistakes that led to the court order, Tina Terrell, Forest Supervisor for the Sequoia National Forest, lead her team to develop a comprehensive monument management plan that engaged the public on every aspect. “Public buy-in and support are critical to the acceptance and ultimate success of this plan. Our goal is to develop a blueprint that will leave a lasting legacy.”

The Forest Service’s Ecosystem Management Coordination (EMC) Publishing Arts group, headquartered in Washington DC, had been investigating web-based software solutions that could enhance publishing, communication, and public engagement.

“Our criteria were very specific,” stated Publishing Arts Program Manager Madelyn Dillon. “It was vital that we explore more proactive collaboration methods and engage our public in more than just traditional methods for commenting. We needed all this functionality to be based in a single centralized, web-based system - not as complex disparate processes.”

After careful consideration and a comprehensive review of the market, Objective was selected as the ideal solution to offer a greater ability to produce the required documents and to gather, analyze, and respond to the public’s comments.

Annually the Forest Service nationwide uses Microsoft Word to produce some 4,000 NEPA documents that incorporate complex planning and scientific information along with tables, graphics, and maps.

All the documents require extensive staff input, collaboration, and review from numerous individuals in various locations, some of them remote.

For the Monument project, the team is using uCreate to assign sections of the document to contributors and then automatically forward completed sections to other team members for review.

All results are stored in a single database, and are analyzed and managed electronically through complete back-office functionality. Because the solution supports extensive coding, the team will apply action and rationale codes to every public comment, eliminating the need to maintain large databases for this task.

REAPING THE BENEFITS

According to Forest Supervisor Terrell, the Forest Service has gained many benefits since implementing the solutions.

“It’s a great advantage to enable numerous document writers from many different

“Objective has had great success at delivering online solutions for the public sector and is renowned for its ability to connect and collaborate with diverse community groups from many demographics. It helps the Forest Service to be transparent, collaborative, and participatory.”

A UNIQUELY COLLABORATIVE SOLUTION

In October 2008, the Forest Service implemented uCreate and uEngage, a decision that was based on the ability of the solution to meet the organisation’s needs.

The Giant Sequoia National Monument Plan was considered ideal as a first project with the Forest Service because of its uniquely collaborative process involving both the public and the scientific community and its diverse, geographically dispersed interdisciplinary team.

The team uses the Microsoft Word and Excel integration capability to import content and tables created outside uCreate, saving time and resources.

The inclusion of maps proved easy with GIS integration capabilities, which allows team members to import both static and interactive maps into the document.

Once completed, the documents - the draft EIS, the draft management plan, and a scientific review report - will be easily published to uEngage, a web-based enterprise consultation system that manages the entire comment and engagement lifecycle.

The team will be able to involve a broad range of relevant stakeholders through a wide variety of response mechanisms, including online polls, surveys, questionnaires, interactive and external documents, and videos.

locations to work collaboratively online, significantly reducing review and revision time. Furthermore, we expanded upon previous methods to provide the public with geo-survey capabilities and ourselves with the ability to import data from Forest Service maps and other databases.”

The content of the Giant Sequoia Monument planning documents will be compiled, formatted, and published in a variety of ways including print, online versions, and even CDs, all at the push of a button. The content can easily be updated, re-used, and re-purposed.

“We have incorporated a web-based portal to provide 24/7 public access to review and comment on documents associated with the planning process. The portal is the single repository for all citizen data and comments, allowing feedback collected via traditional methods to be scanned and logged, so we no longer need to maintain large spreadsheets.”

“ Objective has **successfully** met our requirements and its online portal is a great way to **engage with people** as it helps keep the planning process open, **transparent** and **easy to access.**”

Ms Tina Terrell

Forest Supervisor,
U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service



Other benefits include document-centric collaboration to develop content that successfully communicates and delivers information to internal and external audiences in a timely, transparent manner.

The Forest Service also can host web-based public forums that encourage greater participation among local communities and stakeholders.

The Forest Service has experienced an impressive amount of substantive comments through its web portal.

“Of the 527 scoping comments received, 32 percent were from email, 31 percent from mail and fax, 20 percent from the website,” Terrell stated.

“As a first-time effort at collecting comments through a web portal, we were very happy with the results.”

The agency estimates a 33 percent increase in efficiency in the process of creating the environmental impact statement.

Further improvements are expected in overall efficiency, including a projected improvement of 25 percent in publishing efficiency and timeliness along with increased opportunities for future re-use and re-purposing of content, easily enabled by uCreate.

“Objective has successfully met our requirements and its online portal is a great way to engage with people as it helps keep the planning process open, transparent, and easy to access.

“Using these web-based software-as-a-service tools has proven to be both a time-saving resource and an exciting way to collaborate and communicate with members of the scientific community, the public, and other stakeholders.”

ABOUT OBJECTIVE CORPORATION

Objective Corporation (ASX:OCL) is an established leader and specialist provider of proven content, collaboration and process management solutions for the public sector.

Our solutions empower public sector effectiveness, efficiency and transparency, helping governments deliver better services at a lower cost to the community.

Through direct customer engagement, Objective is committed to delivering outcomes that have a positive effect on the public sector, its citizens and the community.

Since 1987, we have been trusted by Government and Top 1000 corporations to deliver long-term valued business outcomes.

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