

Record of Decision
USDA Forest Service
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests
Land and Resource Management Plan
Environmental Impact Statement

Apache, Coconino, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties, Arizona

INTRODUCTION

This Record of Decision documents my decision approving a land and resource management plan for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests for the next 10 to 15 years. The Forest Plan will normally be revised in 10 years, but must be revised in 15 years. Revision means the entire planning process will be repeated and a completely new plan will be prepared.

This Record of Decision describes alternatives considered and rationale for the selected alternative. The environmentally preferred alternative and the most economically efficient alternative are identified. Mitigation and monitoring measures, implementation procedures, and appeal rights are described. Recommendations for Wild and Scenic River designation of Chevelon Creek and the East Fork, West Fork, and main stem of the Black River are discussed.

DECISION

I have selected the Proposed Action Alternative for management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests for the next 10 to 15 years.

The Forest Plan:

- Balances permitted livestock use with capacity within 10 years.
- Emphasizes management of pinyon-juniper areas for wildlife habitat, fuelwood, and forage production.
- Increases the timber sales level approximately 13%.
- Increases emphasis on recreation management. The demand for developed recreation is met with the assistance of the private sector. Dispersed recreation in concentrated areas is managed to protect settings and maintain experience levels. A higher quality wilderness experience is provided, especially in the Mt. Baldy Wilderness where capacity controls will be initiated. New trails are provided in high use areas and existing trails are better maintained.
- Reduces forest-wide soil loss.
- Provides for a multi-functional workforce to improve management efficiency.

- Increases emphasis on fish and wildlife habitat improvement.
- Recommends the main stem of the Black River be designated a Scenic River.

This alternative will provide quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. Selection of this alternative which emphasizes recreation opportunities, wildlife and fish habitats, and watershed conditions while maintaining a viable timber sales program is appropriate for the desired uses and management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.

The Forest Plan provides management direction for the next 10-15 years. Direction is provided through a mission statement, goals, objectives, multiple-use prescriptions, and standards and guidelines. The Forest Plan contains sufficient detail to schedule and carry out program level decisions. Additional environmental analysis, documentation, and public involvement will be done on site-specific project proposals. No decisions for use of land or resources beyond the 10-15 year life of the Plan have been made. The Plan does not address administrative operations such as personnel matters, purchasing, or organizational changes.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED IN DETAIL

Other alternatives considered in detail were:

Alternative A

Provides management at a reduced budget level which is 75% below preplan levels. This alternative fails to provide an acceptable level of outputs and opportunities responsive to the issues. Many public benefits would be provided at reduced levels.

Alternative B

Emphasizes resource outputs with market values. This alternative was developed with an emphasis on sawtimber and related timber products, livestock permitted use, and developed recreation. Dispersed recreation and water yield were not allowed to exceed 75% of their maximum output levels. Management for all other resources is consistent with the emphasis on market oriented outputs.

Alternative C

Emphasizes resource outputs with non-market values. This alternative emphasizes wildlife, dispersed recreation, quality of wilderness experience, and watershed condition. Developed recreation, permitted grazing use, and timber products (sawtimber and other products) were not allowed to exceed 75% of their maximum output levels.

Alternative D

Meets or exceeds targets assigned to the Forest in the Regional Guide. The targets were developed for the 1980 RPA program. This alternative deals more with the Regional or National issues than local issues.

Alternative E - No Action Alternative

Provides a basis for comparison of other alternatives by projecting existing management into the future. Existing management includes current plans, policies, standards and guidelines to provide resource outputs consistent with current budget levels. This is the No Action Alternative required by National Environmental Policy Act Regulations.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED, BUT ELIMINATED FROM DETAILED STUDY

A number of alternatives were considered, but eliminated from detailed study.

These alternatives and the reasons for eliminating them from detailed study are discussed in Chapter 2 of the Environmental Impact Statement.

REASONS FOR DECISION

My decision is based on evaluation to determine which alternative provides quality on-the-ground resource management, protection, and public service while maximizing net public benefits. Net public benefits are the long-term benefits less costs and are measured by both quantitative and qualitative criteria rather than a single measure or index.

Net public benefits and the quality of on-the-ground management were determined by evaluating how well each alternative responded to issues, by weighing environmental consequences, assessing budget requirements, and considering changing demands placed on the resources of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The State of Arizona, because of its rapid growth over the past several decades and continued expectations of growth in the future, has made dramatic social, economic, cultural, political, and philosophical

changes. These changes must be reflected in the management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests by being more responsive to the needs and desires of the people within the State.

The Proposed Action Alternative is selected because it provides the highest level of issue resolution from an environmental, economic, and social perspective. Economically, it ranks second in efficiency when both market and nonmarket values are taken into consideration and is nearly equal to the environmentally preferable alternative in environmental protection. The selected alternative provides a balanced program within a realistic budget level and therefore, maximizes net public benefits. It best balances competing resources, needs, and public desires.

Issue Resolution

Although all alternatives provide multiple-use benefits while protecting or enhancing environmental quality, issues are treated differently in each alternative, and each alternative resulted in varying degrees of issue resolution.

The table below displays issue resolution using a relative ranking system to compare the alternatives and proposed action alternative:

Relative Ranking of Issue Resolution by Alternative						
ISSUE	PA	A	B	C	D	E
Timber Management	1	6	3	2	4	5
Range Management	1	6	5	3	2	4
Soil and Water	2	6	4	1	3	5
Landownership	1	3	2	2	2	2
Recreation	1	3	2	3	4	5
ORV	1	2	1	1	3	3
Wilderness Management	1	2	2	3	3	4
Wildlife	1	3	2	2	4	5
Transportation	1	5	4	3	2	4
Public Information	1	2	1	1	1	2
Unauthorized Use	1	2	1	1	1	2

1 = Highest Resolution, 6 = Lowest Resolution. Alternatives that resolve the issue equally display the same ranking.

This table displays the ranking of all alternatives on issue resolution. The selected alternative (PA) ranks highest in resolving 12 issues. It ranks second best for resolving one other issue. No other alternative has a consistently high ranking in issue resolution.

Most Economically Efficient Alternative

The selected alternative ranks second in present net value (PNV), which is the primary economic criteria for comparing alternatives. PNV is the difference between the discounted value of all outputs having a monetary value and total discounted management costs. The only alternative having a higher PNV was Alternative B.

Alternative B was designed to emphasize resource outputs with market values. For instance, sawtimber and related products, livestock grazing, and developed recreation were emphasized. The major difference between the PNV of Alternative B and the PA is due to the higher timber harvest level in Alternative B. The PA, with the second best PNV, included more emphasis on non-monetary benefits.

Alternative PA is selected because it provides a higher level of issue resolution, is more responsive to the desires of the people in Arizona, and provides a higher level of environmental protection than Alternative B.

Environmentally Preferred Alternative

The PA and Alternative C are very close in how they affect the environment. However, Alternative C has less soil loss, more transportation system reconstruction, slightly more old growth, more improved riparian areas, and provides a higher level of wildlife habitat diversity and carrying capacity. Therefore, Alternative C is the environmentally preferred alternative.

Alternative C does not resolve as many issues as the PA. For instance, the PA brings permitted grazing use in balance with capacity within 10 years while Alternative C does so within 40 years. Alternative PA was selected over Alternative C because of its overall higher resolution of issues and higher PNV. Alternative PA provides a high level of environmental quality while still resolving the most issues.

RESPONSE TO PUBLIC COMMENTS

To improve the Forest Plan, the public was intensively involved in review of the Draft Forest Plan and Environmental Impact Statement. Information meetings were held with a variety of interest groups and representatives. Over 75 people attended meetings. In addition, 207 written comments were received.

A complete summary of changes made to the draft EIS and Forest Plan because of public comments is displayed in the Public Comments and Forest Service Response portion of the EIS. A brief overview of these changes follows:

- Increased road closures and obliteration objectives from 500 miles to 1,000 miles.
- Increased old-growth management from 18% to 20% of each 10,000-acre diversity unit.
- Added new standards and guidelines to increase inventory, management, protection, and rehabilitation of riparian areas.
- Increased the level of watershed protection.
- Added new standards and guidelines to better describe the grazing situation and provide better direction for improving grazing management.
- Changed the planned 100-unit campground at Willow Springs lake to a 35-unit campground. Established additional user controls around the lake.
- Dropped the planned campground at Scotts Reservoir.
- Added additional units to Aspen, Canyon Point, and Rainbow Campgrounds to meet the demand for developed sites.
- Added a visitor center along Highway 260.
- Dropped the recommendation for wild and scenic river designation of Chevelon Creek and the East and West Forks of the Black River.
- Designated the East and West Forks of the Little Colorado River from Mt. Baldy to Greer as a botanical area in a separate management area.
- Delineated the Sandrock area as a separate management area. Management will emphasize watershed protection and riparian wildlife species.
- Increased the area of prohibited or restricted ORV use to 322,954 acres.

MITIGATION

Mitigation requirements for maintenance and enhancement of environmental quality are incorporated into the standards and guidelines in the Forest Plan:

- Recreation opportunities are provided with levels of service appropriate to the type and extent of use expected. Standards and guidelines will protect soil, water, vegetation, and wildlife resources.
- Wildlife needs are provided through standards and guidelines for diversity, old-growth stands, snags, big game cover on both summer and winter ranges, big game winter range, raptor nest buffers, turkey roost trees, squirrel nest trees, spotted owl habitat, edge contrast, down/dead logs, protection of total areas, roads open to the public, and active logging periods. Improved wildlife habitat will be achieved through integration with other resource activities and habitat improvements. Viable populations of all native vertebrate species will be maintained. Habitats for State and Federally listed threatened, endangered, and sensitive species will be managed with the objective to remove these species from their respective listings.
- Visual quality is provided through the visual resource management objectives.
- Management and protection of cultural resources is assured through standards and guidelines that provide compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act and for coordination with State historic preservation planning. The Forest Plan will provide for Native American religious use and consultation.
- Insect and disease conditions will be monitored on a continuing basis. Integrated forest protection methods will be used for prevention and control of insects and diseases as appropriate.
- Watershed protection and enhancement are provided for through "Best Management Practices" and continued monitoring to assure compliance.
- Minerals and oil and gas activities will be managed through plans of operation to ensure environmental and other resource needs are protected while developing these needed resources.

- Standards and guidelines are included for the management of wilderness and special areas recommended in the Forest Plan.
- Areas needing protection from motorized vehicle use are identified and appropriate management direction will be applied. If motorized vehicle use in specific areas results in unacceptable resource damage or user conflicts, they will be closed to motorized use.

MONITORING

Implementation of the Forest Plan will be monitored as described in Chapter 5 and detailed implementation schedules. The purposes of monitoring are to evaluate whether the Forest mission, goals, and objectives are being realized and to determine how effectively management standards and guidelines have been applied. At specified intervals, results will be evaluated. The results of monitoring and evaluation will measure progress of plan implementation and will help determine when amendments or revisions are needed.

IMPLEMENTATION

Continued public participation will be encouraged during implementation. Environmental analysis of site-specific projects and monitoring activities will provide opportunities for public participation. Watershed condition, riparian condition, timber sales, recreation, and wildlife habitat are expected to maintain a high level of public interest.

The allowable timber sale quantity averages 119 million board feet (MMBF) per year (99 MMBF of sawtimber and 20 MMBF of products). The allowable timber sale quantity is the maximum amount of timber that can be sold during the 10-year life of the plan, but is shown as an average annual figure because most people are more familiar with annual sale volumes. Actual annual timber sales may fluctuate, but the 10-year total cannot be exceeded except for salvage or sanitation sales of timber stands which are substantially damaged by fire, windthrow, other catastrophe, or which are in imminent danger from insect or disease attack.

The planned timber sales level is adequate for presently anticipated demand. There are approximately 29,000 acres of tentatively suitable timber land which were classified as "not appropriate" for timber production. If anticipated demand changes, approximately 7

MMBF of additional timber could be sold from these lands. Appropriate amendment of the Forest Plan and public notification would be required.

The environmental analysis conducted for specific timber sales will provide opportunities for all interested parties to participate. Individual sales will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of other multiple-use objectives. Individual timber sales may be sold where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet other multiple-use objectives. Efforts will be made to reduce timber program costs through such measures as shared services, contracting, and implementing integrated resource management.

The budget for the Forest Plan is an estimated annual average budget for the 10-15 year life of the plan. It is made up of broad averages and annual investment initiatives. Annual budget requests will be based on the Forest Plan. However, if appropriations are less than requested, modified rates of implementation, and additional operating efficiencies will be examined so that planned on-the-ground results will be achieved. Individual projects will be evaluated based on expected costs and revenues and achievement of multiple-use objectives prescribed in the Forest Plan. Individual projects may be implemented where projected costs exceed projected revenues when necessary to meet multiple-use objectives as established by the direction in the Forest Plan.

The Forest Plan will become effective 30 days after the Notice of Availability of the Environmental Impact Statement and this Record of Decision appears in the **Federal Register**. The time needed to bring all activities into compliance with the Forest Plan will vary. Most operation and maintenance activities, projects in the first year of development, new special use proposals, and transfers of existing permits can be brought into compliance with the Forest Plan the first year of implementation. Existing projects as well as contractual obligations will continue as planned. As soon as practicable after approval of the Forest Plan, the Forest

Supervisor will ensure that, subject to valid existing rights, all outstanding agreements and other instruments for occupancy and use of affected lands are consistent with the Forest Plan. Subsequent administrative activities affecting such lands, including budget proposals, shall be based on the Forest Plan. The Forest Supervisor may change proposed implementation schedules to reflect differences between proposed annual budgets and appropriated funds. Such scheduled changes shall not be considered a significant amendment to the Forest Plan. Changes significantly altering the long-term relationship between levels of multiple-use goods and services compared to those projected under actual appropriations may be significant amendments.

The Forest Supervisor may amend the Forest Plan, but must determine whether a proposed amendment would result in a significant change in the Plan. If the change is determined to be significant, the Forest Supervisor shall follow the same procedure as that required for development and approval of a Forest plan. If the change resulting from the amendment is determined not to be significant, the Forest Supervisor may implement the amendment following appropriate public notification and satisfactory completion of National Environmental Policy Act procedures.

APPEAL RIGHTS

This decision is subject to administrative review in accordance with the provisions of 36 CFR 211.18. Notice of appeal must be made in writing and submitted to Sotero Muniz, Regional Forester, Southwestern Region, USDA Forest Service, 517 Gold Avenue SW, Albuquerque, NM 87102, within 45 days from the date of this decision. A statement of reasons to support the appeal and any request for oral presentation must be filed within the 45-day period for filing a notice of appeal.



SOTERO MUNIZ
Regional Forester

OCT. 30 1987

DATE