

**Proposed Action  
for the  
Rim Lakes Wildlife Habitat and Public Safety Project**

**Black Mesa Ranger District  
Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests  
Coconino County, Arizona**

**Background**

An assessment was initiated for the Rim Lakes Ecosystem Management Area (EMA) in 2006 encompassing approximately 33,600 acres on the Black Mesa Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The analysis and treatment areas are located in the west and southern portion of the Black Mesa Ranger District in Coconino County. The general boundaries are: the 500KV powerline near the Dude Fire on the west, and along the Mogollon Rim to Forest Lakes on the east.

The EMA encompasses dispersed camping areas, motorized and non-motorized trails, day use areas and the Rim Lakes Recreation Area (RLRA). This area is a highly desirable recreation destination for the southern Arizona population; for climatic relief, inspiring vistas from the edge of the Mogollon Rim and water based recreation. The RLRA includes the most developed recreation facilities on the Black Mesa Ranger District. Number of visitors to the RLRA continues to grow as the Arizona State population grows and the State transportation system improves between Phoenix metropolitan area and the RLRA. The northeastern boundary of the EMA abuts the community of Forest Lakes. A small subdivision, Rancho Allegre, is a private land inholding in the western portion of the EMA.

Special forest order number 01-402 is in effect for the Beaver Turkey Ridge Special Management Area (SMA) and the Willow Springs Horse Trap SMA. These motorized restricted areas were put in place in the 1980's to promote wildlife forage, cover and habitat, and create quiet areas away from disturbances caused by motorized vehicles. Two other wildlife habitat areas, Carr Lake Wildlife Habitat Area (WHA) and Palomino/Deer Lake WHA were effectively created by administrative road closures in the late 1980's. Acreages of each area are displayed in Table 1.

The desired condition is to designate Carr Lake and Palomino/Deer Lake Wildlife Habitat Areas as Special Management Areas. These would be managed the same as Turkey Beaver and Willow Springs Horse Trap Special Management Areas. There would be no change in the management of Turkey Beaver and Willow Springs Horse Trap Special Management Areas.

Table 1 Existing and Desired Special Management Areas and Wildlife Habitat Areas

	<b>Beaver Turkey Ridge SMA</b>	<b>Willow Springs Horse Trap SMA</b>	<b>Carr Lake WHA</b>	<b>Palomino/Deer Lake WHA</b>
<b>Existing Special Management Areas</b>	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Total number of acres</b>	2924	8602	2270	10405
<b>Number of acres within Rim Lakes EMA</b>	220	602	2270	7714
<b>Desired Special Management Areas</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Current conditions of the EMA transportation system are a combination of state highways, county roads and Forest Service system roads of various conditions. Many roads were built for product extraction. Current road maintenance levels and location in around the Rim Lakes Recreation Area are not designed to meet the high volume of recreation traffic. Most of the project area is managed for high traffic and public motorized use is limited to designated routes. The current open road density is within the 1987 Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Plan Standards and Guidelines.

The desired future condition is to maintain a safe transportation network that accommodates the high recreation traffic with safe egress and ingress in the Rim Lakes Recreation Area.

### **Purpose and Need for Action**

The current condition contributes to unacceptable traffic flow, limited emergency egress and ingress and disturbance to wildlife habitat. The primary purpose of the proposed action is to increase public safety and protect wildlife habitat.

Other benefits include: protection of recreation facilities, enhancement of non-motorized recreation opportunities; improved wildlife habitat; and a safer transportation network.

The Rim Lakes Wildlife Habitat and Public Safety Project is being proposed at this time in response to the need to address conditions on the ground and compliance with the goals and objectives of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Plan (Land Management

Plan) (USDA Forest Service, 1987 as amended 1996). The proposed activities would move the project area toward desired conditions as described in these plans, and as further defined by the interdisciplinary team.

## **Proposed Action**

The Black Mesa Ranger District, Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests is proposing activities on approximately 13,000 acres of National Forest System Lands. Actions included in this proposal are:

- Upgrade 8.75 miles of roads to a higher maintenance level to provide safe and efficient egress and ingress for the public in the Rim Lakes Recreation Area.
- Formalize current motor vehicle restrictions through Special Forest Orders for the Carr Lake and Palomino/Deer Lake Wildlife Habitat Areas to provide for wildlife quiet areas, and non-motorized wildlife viewing and hunting opportunities for the public.

See Appendix A for maps showing boundaries of the project area and more exact locations of the proposed actions.

The environmental assessment is scheduled for completion with a decision document signed by September 2008. If no appeals are filed within the 45-day time period, implementation of the decision may occur on, but not before, 5 business days from the close of the appeal filing period. When appeals are filed, implementation may occur on, but not before, the 15<sup>th</sup> business day following the date of the last appeal disposition.

## **Decisions to be Made**

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests' Forest Supervisor will decide whether to implement the proposed action as described above or choose another alternative. If an action alternative is selected it will include:

- The location, design, and scheduling of the proposed activities or related actions;
- Mitigation measures and monitoring requirements.