

Questions & Answers

2. Why are the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests going through this process?

Each national forest has been directed to examine their recreation facilities and evaluate how they might operate and maintain these structures and sites more efficiently – both as prudent financial managers and in terms of meeting the changing needs of our public. Because many facilities built in the 1950s and 1960s are reaching the end of their useful life, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests need to make hard decisions about which facilities continue to meet the demands of users and which facilities are no longer suitable.

3. How will the public benefit from this analysis process?

RFA will result in higher quality, more efficiently managed recreation sites with facilities aligned with the wants and expectations of visitors.

4. Isn't this just a way to get rid of recreation sites?

No. Many factors are considered in evaluating each developed recreation site. These considerations are related to how well a site supports the recreation needs of the public on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests, the role that sites plays in the local community, and the site's relationship to the environment.

5. Is the Forest Service privatizing recreation venues on public lands?

Recreation opportunities on the national forests and grasslands are provided by a wide array of means. By far, the majority of our recreation facilities are operated and maintained by Forest Service staff. Others are supported through the efforts of volunteers and non-profit partnerships. Private interests providing recreation opportunities on public lands is a long-standing practice and may be one of the options a forest considers when determining how to best manage a particular recreation site. It makes sense, in some cases, to have private interests, who have the resources, the business savvy, and a good visitor service ethic to construct and operate desired recreation opportunities like ski resorts or marinas, or, in other cases, to take over daily management of tasks like operating campgrounds. Alpine ski areas have long been managed by private companies, and outfitters and guides provide a variety of services for many recreation activities. Concession operation is one option a national forest considers when determining how to best manage a particular recreation site.

6. What happens to sites that are currently operated by a concessionaire?

Those sites are evaluated through the RFA process for possible efficiencies in operation. Any proposed changes in operation would be negotiated with the concessionaire, within the framework of their current permit.

7. In an era when recreation demand is increasing, shouldn't the Forest Service also be increasing the number of recreation sites?

Recreation on national forest lands takes many forms. Use is increasing, but it doesn't necessarily involve developed facilities. RFA focuses on developed recreation – one piece of the overall recreation program. RFA helps the Forest Service understand what people are doing, where they are recreating on the landscape, and what facilities may or may not be needed to support those activities. The Forest Service must gather and consider this type of information before making decisions about whether to increase the number of developed recreation sites.

8. What is the Forest Service using to establish recreation needs?

RFA looks at what forests offer in terms of recreation opportunities and what the public wants in terms of outdoor recreation on public land. The Forest Service uses a blend of public participation and data analysis in the process. Market and demographic survey information is used to describe the majority of the visitors to a specific national forest and one-on-one survey information from visitors to that national forest (National Visitor Use Monitoring survey). The Forest Service also uses information collected on a statistical basis from the entire country (National Survey on Recreation and the Environment). In addition, each forest will include public participation and input throughout the entire process, as they work to develop a five-year program of work for their forest's developed recreation sites program. Involvement of the local public, surrounding communities and each national forest's recreation visitors is a critical and essential component of the RFA process. This will ensure the national forest is providing the best recreation opportunities in the right places.

9. How many and what types of recreation sites will be affected and on what kind of timetable?

All developed sites, such as campgrounds, rustic campgrounds, trailheads, interpretive sites, boat launches, and picnic sites will be analyzed and may experience changes. However, many changes to recreation sites won't be noticeable by the visiting public. Changes will occur during a five-year implementation period of the RFA with input from the public to help improve the planned program of work.

10. Will some sites be permanently closed?

After an appropriate level of public involvement, in some cases, this could be an outcome. However, closing a site does not necessarily mean that the location can no longer be used. The Forest Service may change the level of services provided at a

site, such as removing a toilet or a water system at a campground, but the public will still be able to camp in the same location with a more rustic experience.

11. How does RFA relate to Forest Plan Revision, Travel Management and other planning efforts?

There is a consistent tie between RFA and other planning efforts. The RFA gives guidance to travel management and can be used to help describe the desired future condition in forest plan revisions. Where other planning efforts have occurred prior to RFA, it builds on and tiers from them, adding a qualitative and focused look at the developed recreation program.

12. How can partners or volunteer groups be involved in recreation facilities?

For sites that have strong community or visitor support, offers to operate and maintain those sites will be considered. A partnership needs to be a long-term commitment that provides consistency for communities that value a particular site.

13. How does RFA influence and help support local tourism goals?

The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests recognize the importance of recreation and tourism to many communities in southeastern Arizona. Public participation will include discussion of local tourism goals and how recreation sites help meet those goals.

14. How does RFA work into the future? Will new sites ever be developed? Will current sites ever be re-evaluated?

RFA helps us efficiently use our available resources to provide the best quality recreation opportunities possible. In so doing, we position ourselves to better respond to changing recreation demands with facilities and programs in the future. The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests will *review the RFA five-year program of work every year* to monitor how well they are implementing it and whether modifications are required. As new sites are needed to help carryout the developed recreation program, proposed sites would be evaluated with an appropriate level of public involvement through the RFA process to ensure the public's needs would be met with new sites.

15. Is the Forest Service planning to sell recreation sites.

No. There are no plans to sell recreation sites.

16. What types of recreation facilities were evaluated by the RFA?

The RFA process only evaluates recreation sites with facilities such as campgrounds and picnic areas; it does not deal with roads or trails, or with

undeveloped sites such as dispersed campsites and wilderness.

17. Will public comments about recreation facilities be limited to a brief period of time?

An important part of the RFA process is to invite public participation and comment about site-specific modifications to existing facilities. While formal comments should be provided by **September 30, 2008**, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests invite ongoing public comment about improvements to recreation facilities. The RFA will be reviewed on an annual basis and can be modified or amended. Public comments about recreation sites and facilities are always welcome.

18. Is Recreation Facility Analysis something new?

National forests have always evaluated and modified existing recreation facilities to keep them current with use-trends and public needs; however, processes varied from one forest to another. Recreation Facility Analysis standardizes evaluation and modification of recreation facilities nationwide and improves collaboration with the public.

19. How are the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests using RFA?

Many of the Apache-Sitgreaves developed recreation sites were built 30-60 years ago. Since then, visitor preferences and demographics have changed, and some older facilities must be replaced or removed. To respond to these conditions, the Apache-Sitgreaves have developed a *proposed* Recreation Facility Analysis (RFA). The Forest Service is committed to responsibly serving the public by operating efficiently and providing appropriate, quality recreation opportunities. The RFA will help.

20. What are the goals of RFA?

- a. Sustain recreation opportunities consistent with the Forest's "recreation niche" (the unique recreation experiences the Apache-Sitgreaves provides)
- b. Keep up with the demand for recreation facilities on all ranger districts
- c. Operate and maintain recreation sites to national standards of health and safety
- d. Improve the quality of recreation facilities by reducing the deferred maintenance backlog.

21. What has happened so far?

In the fall of 2005 Apache-Sitgreaves employees looked hard at all recreation opportunities, including what they cost, how much they were used, and whether they met user expectations. The Forests' recreation program must become more

focused on what people typically come to the Apache-Sitgreaves to experience. The first steps of the analysis involved data collection (by surveying the public and assessing facilities), defining the Forest's "recreation niche," and ranking all developed recreation sites on the forest (using a scientific computer model that incorporates things like costs, use levels, and conformance with niche).

22. What is the Apache-Sitgreaves recreation niche?

The Apache Sitgreaves is Arizona's Oasis, offering cool air, clear water and snowy mountains. Cool temperatures, access to lakes and streams and scenic values characterize the area while diverse wildlife inhabits open meadows and forested mountains. Scenic roads and challenging trails provide visitors with connection to vast primitive and dispersed setting throughout the forest. Picturesque settings range from high deserts to some of the highest mountains in Arizona. Pre-historic Indians, Spanish and Mexican immigrants, Mormon settlers, and modern day snow birds have shared the quality of life in the White Mountains. The Apache Sitgreaves recreation niche includes four types of settings: scenic corridors, dispersed areas, wilderness/primitive areas, and developed sites. Each setting has associated activities and recreation site types. (See the Recreation Facility Analysis for a full description and map.)

23. What are the planned changes to campgrounds, picnic areas and trailheads on the Apache- Sitgreaves National Forests?

There are eleven sites that will be replaced with newer facilities:

- Blue Vista (Alpine RD)
- Black Canyon Lake (Black Mesa RD)
- Military Sinkhole Vista (Black Mesa RD)
- Rim Lakes Vista (Black Mesa RD)
- Spillway Group Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Woods Canyon Dump Station (Black Mesa RD)
- Woods Canyon Group Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Woods Canyon Lake Area (Black Mesa RD)
- Woods Canyon Lake Vista (Black Mesa RD)
- Benny Creek (Springerville RD)
- Lewis Canyon (Lakeside RD)

Five sites will be expanded to accommodate more use:

- Aspen Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Canyon Point Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Mogollon Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Woods Canyon Group Campground (Black Mesa RD)
- Rocky Point Picnic (Black Mesa RD)

Three sites may be managed thru alternative methods:

- Upper Blue Campground (Alpine RD): This site has minimum site usage. Proposal: reduce all services, seek partners from the local area to perform services.
- Blue Crossing Campground (Alpine RD): same as Upper Blue Campground
- Hannagan Meadow Snow Play Trailhead (Alpine RD): The toilet facility is expensive to maintain and there are suitable toilets nearby. Proposal: reduce services (clean and pump less frequently), have Lodge permit holder assume responsibilities of cleaning and pumping.

Three sites may be decommissioned:

- Cottonwood Wash Trailhead (Black Mesa RD): Issues include high occurrence of vandalism, high maintenance costs, and low trail use. Proposal: return to natural state by removing all improvements.
- Mallard Trailhead (Black Mesa RD): This site is unnecessary since the Merganser Trailhead parking lot can be used for a trailhead. Proposal: return site to natural state.
- Lakeside Campground (Lakeside RD): This campground is within the city limits and no longer provides a national forest setting. Proposal: at the end of the concession permit in 2010, consider decommissioning the campground and exchanging this land; no new facilities will be considered.

There are a total of 217 developed sites on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. The Forest-wide summary of modification proposals includes:

- Add one new concession campground. (Big Lake Multi Family)
- Convert one over night campground to day use area. (Scotts Reservoir)
- Reduce season or days of operation at 40 sites.
- Add new facilities at 11 sites
- Establish Stewardship Partners at 20 sites
- Initiate user fees at 19 sites
- Reduce three facilities thru land exchanges. Camp Shadow pines , Big Springs Trailhead, and Mogollon Rim Trailhead and Trail.

24. Why are you making these changes?

Some facilities on the Forests are rarely used. The cost of maintenance cannot be justified. Instead, maintenance funds can be better allocated to improving other sites.

Some sites are redundant because they are located near other similar Forest recreation sites. Consolidating such sites will continue to provide recreation opportunities in an area, but less land will be impacted, thereby increasing wildlife habitat.

Some sites do not meet the recreation focus or “recreation niche” of the Forest. These facilities do not meet visitor expectations. Sites that consistently disappoint users aren’t worth keeping.

Facilities that do not comply with modern standards of health and safety must be removed or replaced.

The proposed plan meets targets of fiscal responsibility, meets mandatory standards, and retires deferred maintenance work. (See plan for complete information.)

25. Will the RFA process improve recreation opportunities on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests?

Yes. The Apache-Sitgreaves will remain a place where visitors can find a wide range of quality recreation settings and opportunities. Most of the recommendations in the proposed RFA (a 5-year program of work) focus on improving the overall value of Forest-wide recreation facilities while causing the least inconvenience or disruption to users, such as reducing seasons or days of operation when visitation is light or non-existent, removing substandard, dilapidated, or redundant facilities, and building new partnerships with interested users to improve site stewardship. The RFA will help align the Forest recreation program with the results of past public survey responses.

26. When will the RFA be finalized?

The RFA proposal will be finalized after the public has had at least 30 days to submit comments, and after Forest officials have reviewed and considered those comments and incorporated any changes. The process should be complete during the fall of 2007.

27. Who is the decision-maker?

Elaine Zieroth, Apache Sitgreaves Forest Supervisor, will sign the RFA.

28. Will modifications recommended by the RFA be implemented immediately?

No. Implementation is expected to begin in the Spring of 2008, and will take place over 5 years. Whenever a recreation site is modified, improved, or expanded, the public will be notified.

- 29. Does RFA require any environmental analysis?** NEPA work is not required to complete the RFA; however, any significant modifications to recreation sites that result from the RFA will require NEPA analysis, including public involvement.
- 30. How can I comment now?** The Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests recognize the importance of recreation sites and welcomes written comments and suggestions via email at comments-southwestern-apachesitgreaves@fs.fed.us. Public participation is important to ensure the RFA meets visitor needs and expectations in a cost-effective manner. Comments from the public about recreation facilities are welcome now or anytime.