

Collaboration Report for Forest Plan Revision

Prescott National Forest



May 2011

Updated April 2014 and July 2015

Cover photo: Upper Verde River above Clarkdale, AZ (June 2007)

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	1
Introduction.....	1
Collaboration Done Prior to the Notice of Intent.....	2
Collaborative Development after Publication of the Notice of Intent	9
Collaboration between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements.....	13
Ongoing Collaboration.....	17
List of preparers	19
References.....	19
Supporting Documents in the Plan Record	20

List of Figures

Figure 1. Community Resource Units Relative to the Prescott NF (Adapted from Confab, 2007).....	4
Figure 2. Community visioning meeting in Prescott, AZ (November 2007).....	5
Figure 3. Cross-community visioning meeting in Arcosanti, AZ (April 2008).....	6
Figure 4. Public meeting in Prescott, AZ (February 2009).....	7
Figure 5. Map of geographic areas and management areas on the Prescott NF	12
Figure 6. Stewardship Forum summer picnic at Mingus Mountain on the Prescott NF (May 2009).....	17

Executive Summary

The Prescott National Forest (Prescott NF or the forest) used both formal and informal collaboration methods to prepare for and carry out plan revision. The Prescott NF approach was to augment traditional public participation by engaging citizens in planning, implementation, and ongoing stewardship of the forest. This meant inviting citizens to discuss and agree on their desires for the future and exploring ways to support and sustain stewardship in and around the Prescott NF.

Informal methods used to engage citizens and local institutions included human geographic mapping, identification of informal community networks, and outreach to informal community leaders. Detailed information on each Community Resource Unit was compiled and community landscape vision statements were developed or obtained from 11 communities. Discussions with citizen groups took place regarding draft versions of the proposed revised plan. Five different draft versions were posted on the Prescott NF planning Web site for comment via email, phone, face-to-face interaction, or online. An annotated version of Draft 4 was prepared to highlight changes resulting from the suggestions received; discussions related to potential alternatives for the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) also took place.

The formal methods used included public meetings, Web page feedback forms, and public comments on documents. Information gathered from members of the public and Prescott NF personnel contributed to an Economic and Social Sustainability Assessment (Forest Service, 2008). Information attained through both formal and informal citizen engagement was used to inform the development of the Ecological Sustainability Report (Forest Service, 2009a), Analysis of the Management Situation (Forest Service, 2009b), and Draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Prescott National Forest (proposed revised plan) (Forest Service, 2012)¹.

Indications that collaborative methods will continue to be used in the future include collaborative approaches used by citizens for potential wild and scenic river designation for the upper Verde River and Stewardship Forum, Verde Front, and Agua Fria/Black Canyon City partner interest in participating in and co-convening the Prescott NF Recreation Strategy process. The emergence of the citizen-led Stewardship Forum and the development of the local nonprofit Community Forest Trust (CFT) will contribute to planning, implementation, and stewardship efforts on the Prescott NF.

Introduction

The Prescott NF decided it wanted to engage citizens in a meaningful way in the revision of the land and resource management plan (plan). This involved not just asking for citizen input but inviting them to share their desires for the future and inventing new ways to support and sustain stewardship. One definition of this type of stewardship is:

Community-based ecological stewardship – A citizen centered process through which people, government, and science interact to share knowledge, build consensus, and gain mutual understanding, ownership, and responsibility for attaining a productive and sustainable relationship with the land.

Gary McVicker, 2011

¹ The ESSA, ESR, and AMS documents are available on the Prescott NF plan revision Web site under “On-Line Files,” and the Draft Land and Resource Management Plan is available under “Drafts of the Forest Plan”: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/prescott/landmanagement/planning>

The goal was to work toward community-based ecological stewardship during plan revision citizen engagement. The Prescott NF found this collaborative approach to be very valuable in augmenting the formal public participation processes with information and opportunities that were discovered through informal networks and leaders and by using human geography (Kent and Preister, 1999; Confab, 2007). The real value of this approach is broad community engagement, which can result in coalitions of individuals and groups who have interest, energy, time, and resources and who want to be involved with stewardship of their national forest.

This document describes the public participation and collaboration that took place as part of the revision of the 1987 Land and Resource Management Plan (1987 plan or existing plan). It is divided into four parts:

1. Collaboration Done Prior to the Notice of Intent

This included work done before the publication of the Notice of Intent to revise the Land and Resource Plan for the Prescott National Forest. It was conducted in an informal manner to involve citizens in the existing plan revision process, to develop relationships with groups and individuals across the national forest, and to identify citizen issues that would lead to development of Needs for Change in the existing plan.

2. Collaborative Development after Publication of the Notice of Intent

This activity took place after the Notice of Intent was published. It included using an iterative approach to develop plan components, with multiple versions discussed and modified.

3. Collaboration between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

This section includes a summary of the comments received about the draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), the analysis carried out on the DEIS comments received, and a description of how the final revised plan and the final environmental impact statement (FEIS) were modified to respond to these comments.

4. Ongoing Collaboration

The collaboration tools and techniques used for the plan revision process were identified as an effective means of interacting with citizens, interest groups, and others. It was determined to carry on with collaboration as plan implementation took place. This section contains a summary of the efforts that are expected to lead to continued collaboration with interested publics to implement forest management into the future.

Collaboration Done Prior to the Notice of Intent

As part of the Prescott NF's effort to revise its plan, the planning staff needed to determine what issues were important to the people who live near or visit the forest. This information would assist planners in identifying the parts of the 1987 plan that were out of date or did not respond to current issues and needed to be changed. Several analyses and collaboration techniques were used to make that determination. A timeline of collaboration and other events related to plan revision is shown in the plan record².

Background Information

² See File A-1.

In 2005, a general Socio-Economic Assessment for the Prescott NF was completed by the University of Arizona, School of Natural Resources; it documented baseline information related to the Forest Service and the situation within Arizona. In 2006, wide-scale assessments of public values, attitudes, and beliefs toward National Forest System Lands (Adams-Russell Consulting, 2006) were completed and compiled into two reports. The first covered Arizona Tribal Peoples and the second dealt with others who interact with the Prescott NF. The report for Arizona Tribal Peoples includes comments from two meetings, one held in northern Arizona and the other held in southern Arizona. Tribal people at the meeting shared their views on tribal involvement in forest planning, the consultation process, and forest resources and multiple use beliefs and values. The report for others who interact with the Prescott NF documents attitudes, beliefs, and values (ABV) using focus group studies that are related to forest management and resources.

Community Description; Citizen Network and Issue Identification

In 2007, the Prescott NF contracted with Confab to develop a strategy for including public participation in the upcoming plan revision process. The resulting report provided the following:

- Knowledge of informal networks active in communities
- Citizen issues and issue holders/carriers
- Definition of the natural boundaries of communities throughout the planning area--Human Geographic Mapping (figure 1)
- Realistic, practical opportunities to build capacity and relationships. These projects were called “resolve as you go” to build a constituency for the plan revision process and beyond
- Communication strategies for each human geographic area
- A strategy for integrating the informal community process with formal public meetings and future comment and objection/resolution processes

Confab conducted face-to-face interviews with people over a 30-day period to describe their communities, the interpersonal networks in these communities, and the issues carried by people within their communities. Figure 1 displays mapped Community Resource Units identified by Confab.

Community Resource Units (CRUs) are the geographic areas to which people feel attached, where interactions among people are most often face-to-face, and where people feel like part of a community. Geographic features and settlement patterns often strongly influence these boundaries. In rural areas, CRUs often include areas outside of town that are considered part of the community. The plan record³ further describes human geographic mapping and includes portions of community information reported by Confab with updates by Prescott NF staff.

³ See Files A-7, A-8, A-9, A-10, and A-11.

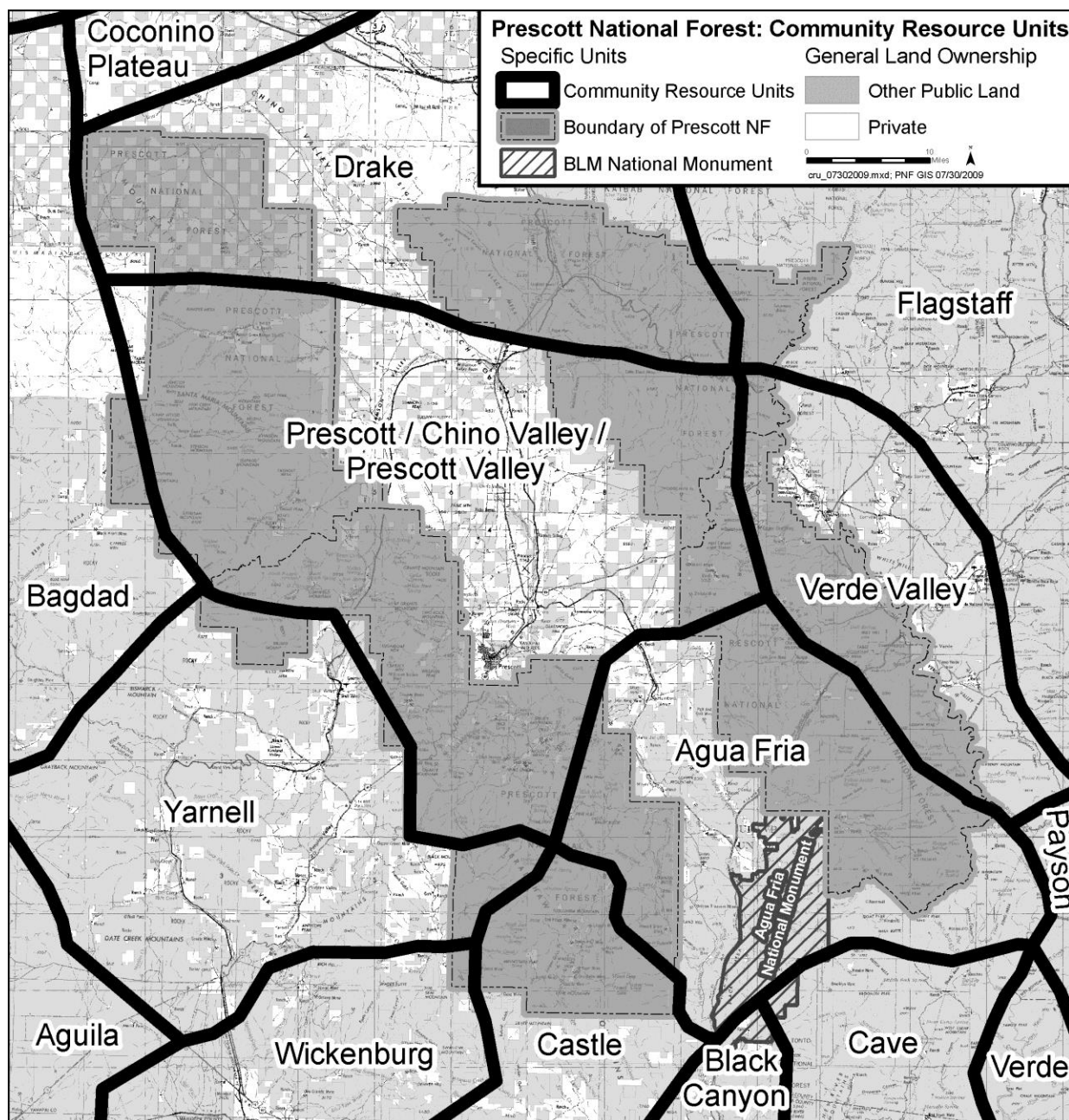


Figure 1. Community Resource Units Relative to the Prescott NF (Adapted from Confab, 2007)

The work initiated by Confab was continued by the Prescott NF staff and contributed to the overall knowledge of local issues. A few excerpts from over 200 documented informal contacts with individuals and groups are shown below.

Issue: Access to the Prescott NF - Motorcycle shop: *“Access to traditional trails is being lost to lot splits and housing developments”*

Issue: Recreation on the Prescott NF - Coffee shop: *“Only one trailhead; want more on the Prescott NF”*

Issue: Better management of Off-Highway Vehicles - Rancher conversation: *“Wilhoit uses [grazing allotment] as recreation area”; “Only interested in running quads, maybe hunting,”* Person attending a watershed meeting: *Make OHV riders aware of trail “etiquette,” especially around horseback riders.* Grazing permittee: *Quads “tear up the place;” “won’t stay on trails.”*

Issue: Economic impacts to communities - Fire Chief: *“We depend on tourist traffic for economy”*

Issue: Vegetation management - Retired US Fish and Wildlife employee: *We need to address the weed situation now, not later.*

Issue: Climate Change - Nature Conservancy program director: *“For Forest systems, focus on increasing system resiliency and health.”*

Community Visioning and Informal Engagement



Figure 2. Community visioning meeting in Prescott, AZ (November 2007)

The Prescott NF chose to use the Community Resource Units (CRUs) (figure 1) originally identified by Confab (2007) to learn about community values. Planners approached community network leaders to see if they were interested in developing community visions that would include issues related to the Prescott NF. Citizen networks and community leaders from most CRUs invited planners from the Prescott NF to a variety of community meetings.

Citizens were invited to share their vision for the future for the land. The Prescott NF offered to provide

facilitation, if requested, and facilitation by professional third-party neutrals was obtained via Interagency Agreement with Southwest Decision Resources. The facilitator, national forest planners, and citizens helped to organize and coordinate identification of initial community vision components. Community volunteers wrote up the draft or final visions and the Prescott NF offered to post them on the planning Web site. Diverse groups of citizens shared their ideas, discussed differences, learned from one another, and discovered many common interests. Numerous citizen issues surfaced during the dialogue. Eleven

communities completed draft or final community vision statements that can be found in appendix C of the proposed revised plan⁴.

In April of 2008, citizens expressed a desire to hold a cross-community meeting⁵ with representatives from all the CRUs. The purpose was to share their interests and visions regarding the Prescott NF and the surrounding landscape and to look for commonality among the issues and interests. The Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership hosted this meeting in Arcosanti, AZ, on April 15, 2008. Common citizen issues included: desire to maintain open space, landscape health, fuels reduction, improved management of off-highway vehicle use, litter, continued access, wildland-urban interface issues, and increased recreational opportunities. Numerous opportunities developed to share information with citizens and to listen for emerging issues. The issues identified during the community visioning process and through informal contacts helped to shape the priorities in the Need for Change segment of plan revision.



Figure 3. Cross-community visioning meeting in Arcosanti, AZ (April 2008)

On April 17, 2008, a community meeting titled *"Your Forest Vision and the Way Forward"* brought together approximately 30 interested people at the Highlands Center to share the draft community vision developed for Prescott, Prescott Valley, and Chino Valley. The meeting was co-hosted by the Arizona Trail Riders, Arizona Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition, Arizona Wilderness Coalition, Back Country Horsemen, City of Prescott Parks and Recreation Department, Hyde Mountain Vista Group, Open Space Alliance of Central Yavapai County, Prescott Area Wildland/Urban Interface Commission, Prescott Cycling Club, Prescott National Forest, Prescott Open Trails Association, and Yavapai Cattle Growers Association. Two new groups, Highlands Center for Natural History and Yavapai County Trails Committee, asked to be included in future discussions. The draft vision was presented by representatives of co-hosting sponsors, and there was general agreement on the final vision. Attendees also discussed the next steps in the process of achieving the vision and ideas for implementing the vision. These included ideas for increasing the capacity of the Forest Service and the proposal to form a "stewardship" group that could continue working with the Prescott NF on planning issues. This eventually evolved into the Stewardship Forum, which represents a number of different interests in the Prescott area.

Community Bulletin Boards

The Prescott NF used known community bulletin boards⁶ to post notices of the community visioning meetings, visioning feedback, and public meetings. The motto used for the process, *"If you invite us, we will come,"* resulted in numerous and often repeated invitations for the forest planning staff to attend community meetings. These meetings provided a venue where information was shared with the public

⁴ Community vision statements are also documented in File A-2 in the plan record.

⁵ Information about the community visioning meetings is also available on the Prescott NF plan revision Web site under "On-Line Files": <http://www.fs.usda.gov/main/prescott/landmanagement/planning>

⁶ Bulletin board locations are listed in File A-3 in the plan record.

and input was gathered for use in the development of the revised plan. The groups, agencies, and tribes contacted during this informal engagement are listed in the plan record⁷.

Traditional Public Engagement

Pre-meetings with the Stewardship Forum and with the Verde Front group were held to gather feedback on the proposed public meeting agenda. On February 25 and 26, 2009, the Prescott NF hosted meetings in Camp Verde and Prescott regarding potential needs for change in the existing plan (1987 plan). The meeting started with a presentation to share background information and provide an overview of the planning process. Attendees then discussed possible needs for change in small groups, and during report-out to the whole meeting, identified the highest priority needs for change. These were captured on flip charts and all attendees then used “dot-voting,” placing a specified number of colored sticky dots next to the needs for change they most favored, to summarize meeting outcomes. This feedback was used to validate and refine the issues identified through the informal methods. The attendees at the formal meetings favored the following topics for Prescott NF forest plan revision focus: recreation, watershed health, reintroduction of fire as a disturbance, and open space.

The Prescott NF prepared several press releases about the progress of the plan revision effort that included contact information. Two radio interviews regarding plan revision by Prescott NF planning staff occurred in August 2008 and March 2009, and periodic planning updates were sent out during 2008 to over 400 individuals and organizations. The Prescott NF Web page was used as a tool to disseminate information about the plan revision process and to gather written feedback about the revised plan.



Figure 4. Public meeting in Prescott, AZ (February 2009)

Other government agencies contacted during the plan revision are listed in the plan record⁸. These contacts consisted of requests for information for the Ecological Sustainability Report, sharing the Economic and Social Sustainability Assessment, or updates on the plan revision process.

Consultation with tribes consisted of formal letters to all groups with interest in the Prescott NF, phone calls, and visits by forest staff and leadership to the Yavapai-Prescott Tribe and the Yavapai-Apache Nation. In November of 2008, the forest tribal relations liaison participated in discussions with, and provided briefing papers to, all six tribal groups that have connections to the Prescott NF⁹.

How Information Received was Used During Plan Revision

As a result of the extensive amount of interaction with citizens, information received from members of the public was included in the documents prepared during the early stages of the plan revision process.

⁷ See Files A-4, A-5, and A-6.

⁸ See File A-5.

⁹ See File A-6.

Economic and Social Sustainability Report (ESSA): Completed in October 2008, the ESSA combined information obtained from the informal and formal contacts, community visioning meetings, and the public meetings in Prescott and Camp Verde with agency personnel concerns and applicable portions of the 1987 plan. Information on key trends, community issues, and visions was incorporated into appendix A of the ESSA and provided essential guidance on many of the topics carried forward into the Forest Plan components.

Ecological Sustainability Report (ESR): The ESR was finalized in April of 2009, and its information was validated in several instances through informal methods. An example is the disagreement over the desired density of trees in some piñon-juniper woodland systems; the feedback included comments that represented opposing views on the subject. To address this, when the ESR was written the piñon-juniper vegetation type was divided into three sub-types, and ultimately different desired conditions were developed for each in the revised plan.

Examples of information gathered for the ESR using traditional methods include species of interest and species of concern data gathered with assistance from the Arizona Game and Fish Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. (At that time, the 2008 Planning Rule was in force and terminology such as species of concern was appropriate).

Analysis of the Management Situation (AMS) Initial list of needs for change, Integrated List of Possible Needs for Change, and Selected Needs for Change: Table 3 of the AMS listed ecological concerns, economic and social concerns, and public comments. Included in the public concerns were those related to:

- providing diverse and sustainable recreation experiences that meet the desire of communities,
- maximizing the value of Prescott NF open space,
- addressing access across non-Prescott NF lands for recreational and other purposes,
- describing desires for the wildland urban interface,
- responding to smoke emission concerns,
- addressing demand for utility and transportation corridors,
- maintaining sustainable contribution to ranching and forest products industries, and
- identifying desired characteristics of healthy watersheds.

The potential needs for change were combined based on interactions between ecological and social concerns, and eight possible needs for change were described (AMS, p. 32-33).

The Prescott NF leadership team then identified a final list of Needs for Change, based on the capacity of the forest. These are listed in the AMS (p.37), and include the following:

- Citizen issues relating to fuel reduction, restoring fire adapted ecosystems, and smoke were incorporated into Need for Change 1: "Restore vegetation structure, composition, and desired characteristics of fire to selected ecosystems while responding to citizen concerns related to smoke emissions."
- Watershed health and water quality and quantity issues were incorporated into Need for Change 2: "Retain or improve watershed integrity to provide desired water quality, quantity and timing of delivery."
- The number one issue at public meetings in Prescott and the Verde Valley was providing sustainable recreation opportunities on the Prescott NF. That issue was combined in Need for Change 3: "Provide sustainable, diverse recreation experiences that consider population

demographic characteristics reflect desires of local communities, avoid overcrowding and user conflicts and minimize resource damage."

- An off-shoot of watershed health concerns was the need to address declines in native fish in some watersheds. Since many of these declining species are federally threatened or endangered species, they were listed separately in Need for Change 4: "Provide desired habitat for native fish species."
- The issue of open space that came up in the Verde Valley and Black Canyon City community vision discussions was addressed in Need for Change 5: "Enhance the value of open space provided by the Prescott National Forest by defining the visual character within areas near or viewed by those in local communities."

Collaborative Development after Publication of the Notice of Intent

The Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an environmental impact statement for revision of the Prescott NF plan was published on January 19, 2010. It included a description of the Needs for Change for plan revision and provided opportunity for comment. Fifty comments were received from individuals and groups, and an additional 2,601 form letter emails were generated from the Web page of a national environmental group. The comments were read to determine whether any new needs for change should be added, or if the current needs should be modified. In August of 2010, as alternatives were being discussed, the comments received following publication of the NOI were combined with the comments received at public meetings. The combined comments were then analyzed to ensure that all concerns identified were addressed.

Development of the Proposed Revised Plan

The development of the plan components took place over the course of a year, with initial work on desired conditions beginning in fall of 2009, and the initial development of standards, guidelines, management area direction, objectives, and monitoring strategies following in 2010.

Several draft versions of the proposed revised plan were posted to the Prescott NF Web site for comment and discussions from the resulting feedback took place after each posting. Draft 1 was posted on May 4, 2010 and included just the initial version of desired conditions, standards, and guidelines. Planners were invited to meetings of the Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership, the Stewardship Forum, and the Verde Front to present the initial draft and to discuss possible adjustments. These three groups are comprised of people with a variety of interests in the Prescott NF, and the planning staff was fortunate that members of these groups volunteered to review Draft 1 and share their concerns.

Draft 2 of the proposed revised plan was posted on June 11, 2010 and included a modified set of desired conditions that addressed resiliency to climate change, among other changes. Draft 2 also provided the first version of objectives to be posted on the Web page and standards and guidelines that were slightly changed from Draft 1; it did not include management area guidance or a monitoring strategy. Many of the modifications included in this draft were related to improving clarity and ease of understanding.

On July 2, 2010, Draft 3, the first version of the revised plan that included all major components, was posted online. It contained modified desired conditions, modified objectives (an open space objective was added), standards, guidelines, and a new monitoring strategy. Draft 3 was the version used for discussion at public meetings.

After three review meetings with members of the Prescott NF leadership team, Draft 4 was posted on the planning Web page on February 4, 2011. An annotated version was also included that used comment boxes to point out adjustments that had been made to Draft 3 to produce the Draft 4 revised plan.

Meetings with Citizens

Public meetings, sponsored by the Prescott NF were held in Prescott on August 3, 2010 and in Cottonwood on August 5, 2010 to discuss Draft 3 of the proposed revised plan, present the potential wilderness inventory and evaluation, and gather information on future draft environmental impact statement alternatives. The meetings were organized in an open house format, and members of the interdisciplinary team were available to answer questions from the public about the plan components. A comment form was provided, and attendees were encouraged to call or email about any additional questions or concerns.

During February and March of 2011, the planning core team was invited to the Recreation Strategy meetings to provide planning updates to the participant groups. The meetings were held at three locations: Prescott, AZ (February 20), Cottonwood, AZ (February 28) and at Arcosanti, near Cordes Lakes, AZ (March 1). During these meetings, potential alternatives to the proposed revised plan and the process for, and results of, the potential wilderness inventory and evaluation were discussed. An email was sent to community networks when Draft 4 of the proposed revised plan was posted on the Web site.

Meetings with Agencies or Local Governments

During the plan revision process, meetings were held with representatives from other management agencies and various local governments. Approximately 200 interactions took place with groups or individuals from these institutions, and included face-to-face meetings, email notification of plan revision Web site postings, and formal memos and letters. For example, Arizona Game and Fish Department employees were kept updated at annual coordination meetings through emails and during meetings to review the first draft of the proposed revised plan. A list of government agencies is found in the plan record¹⁰.

How Information Received was Used During Plan Revision

As the plan revision process unfolded, community values and issues had an influence on the focus of plan components. Excerpts from selected plan components that were developed as a result of interaction with citizens are listed below.

Forest Plan Components—Desired Conditions

Examples of desired condition statements that directly respond to needs for change and public issues are listed below:

Smoke

- Smoke or dust levels meet national ambient air quality standards. Conflicts between smoke aversion and restoration of ecosystems are minimized and smoke impacts to communities are minimized. Citizens are aware of timing, ignition sources, and benefits of fires and their resulting smoke.

¹⁰ See File A-5.

Watershed Health

- Adequate quantity and timing of water flows are maintained in streams, seeps, springs, and wetlands to retain or enhance ecological functions.
- Water quality is sustained at a level that retains the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of the aquatic systems and benefits survival, growth, reproduction, and migration of native and desired nonnative aquatic and riparian species. Soil and vegetation functions in upland and riparian settings are retained or enhanced. Resilient landscapes provide forage for browsing and grazing animals, timber production, and recreation opportunities, without negatively impacting soil and water productivity
- Riparian corridors are intact and functioning across the landscape.

Recreation

- A wide variety of recreation experiences and benefits exist across the Prescott NF landscape, emphasizing opportunities for those of current and future demographics as well as abilities, to discover and enjoy.
- Recreational facilities and constructed features (trails, trailheads, etc.) minimize resource impacts, especially those related to watershed integrity.

Open Space

- Open-space values including those related to naturally appearing landscapes, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunity, riparian/wetland character and community needs are retained.

Forest Plan Components--Management Area Desired Conditions

The Forest was divided into three geographic areas using human geographic boundaries developed earlier (Confab, 2007). Community vision statements related to recreation or open space were included for each. Geographic areas were subdivided into a total of seven management areas (see figure 5). The following are sample excerpts from management area desired conditions that respond to public concerns (management area shown in parenthesis):

- The nonmotorized Black Canyon Trail stretches from BLM land ownership through the Prescott National Forest connecting Black Canyon City to Camp Verde (Agua Fria).
- Interactions between grazing permittees and recreationists are generally positive or benign including signing and other tools to communicate the need to respect gate closures for livestock and natural resources (Agua Fria).
- Recreation information is available to visitors to Crown King;...Areas are generally trash free...dispersed campsites near the community of Crown King...show minimal compaction and have vegetative cover...Recreational target shooting is not common in the Crown King area (Crown King).
- ...the upper Verde River retains its outstandingly remarkable values, while recreation facilities are found in several locations along the river (Upper Verde).
- Trails with various intended are located so that conflicts between different uses are minimized. Trails and trailheads located along the interface between the Forest Service and other ownership efficiently and effectively provide access to the Prescott National Forest, while avoiding resource damage (Williamson Valley North).
- Facilities that support trail systems...are found in the vicinity of Camp Wood Road (County Road 68) as well as near the Prescott Basin Management Area (Williamson Valley South).
- The Black Mountain Range...provides a scenic backdrop for the entire valley (Verde Valley).

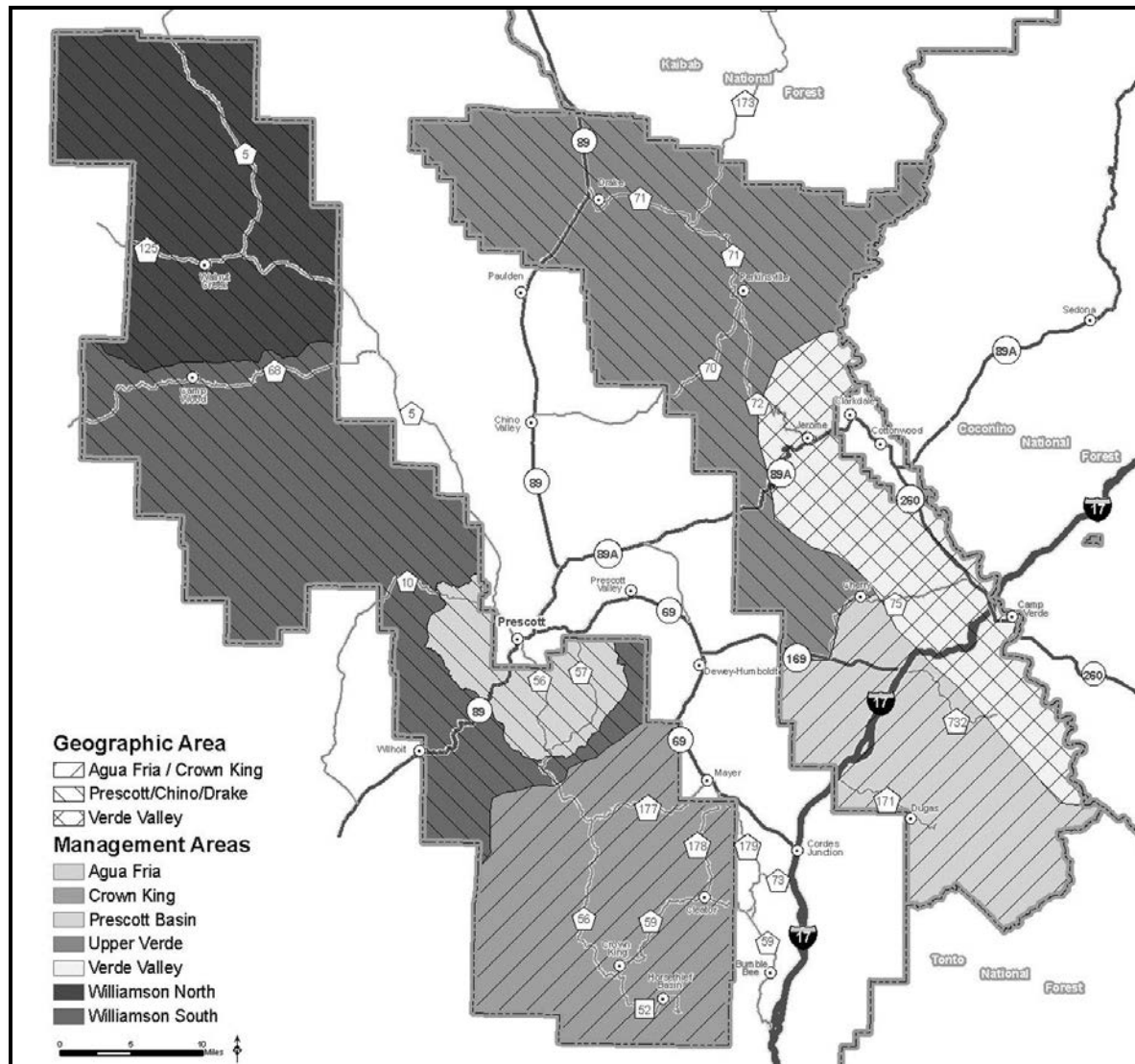


Figure 5. Map of geographic areas and management areas on the Prescott NF

Development of the Plan Alternatives

The public and other agencies, both State and Federal, submitted comments in response to the 2010 NOI comment period and public meetings. These comments were analyzed to identify issues and frame their associated cause and effect relationships. Issues were separated into two groups: significant and non-significant. Significant issues are those used to develop alternatives and modify the proposed action (proposed revised plan). Non-significant issues are identified as those: (1) outside the scope of the proposed action; (2) already addressed by law, regulation, the proposed revised plan, or other higher level decision; (3) irrelevant to the decision to be made; or (4) conjectural and not supported by scientific or factual evidence. The following three significant issues served as the basis for alternative development:

- An issue of high concern was the proposed revised plan did not place enough emphasis on **ecosystem restoration** to maintain species viability and habitat. Lack of fire as a natural disturbance process has led to a vegetation structure and composition that does not resemble the estimated reference conditions. Some of the public believe the level of vegetation treatments in the proposed revised plan may not achieve the desired conditions in the most severely departed vegetation types.
- Another issue of high concern to Prescott and Verde Valley residents was providing sustainable recreation opportunities on the Prescott NF. There was interest in providing more **dispersed recreation opportunities** than those included in the proposed revised plan, including a greater emphasis on improving existing trail conditions and providing additional opportunities on new trails.
- There was also a wide variation of opinion on how much **recommended new wilderness** is appropriate. It ranged from those who felt that the existing designated areas are adequate to those who felt that nearly all areas evaluated should be recommended for designation.

The Prescott NF developed two additional alternatives (alternatives C and D) to respond to these issues:

- **Alternative C** (Vegetation and Wildlife Emphasis) was developed to address the issue specific to species viability and habitat by providing a greater focus on the improvement of ecological conditions and wildlife habitats. More emphasis was placed on restoring the vegetation types that are the most severely departed from desired conditions. Restoration treatment activities are increased within the ponderosa pine and grassland PNVTs. More emphasis is also included for native fish habitat and species such as pronghorn that are of viability concern. This alternative includes no additional recommended wilderness areas for designation.
- **Alternative D** (Dispersed Recreation Emphasis) was developed to address the issue specific to providing a greater quantity and diversity of recreation. It focuses on increasing opportunities for sustainable and diverse recreation through additional trail mileage, more designated dispersed camping, and more trailhead improvement. This alternative also includes the highest number of recommended wilderness areas.

Collaboration between the Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements

Overview

The notice of availability (NOA) of the Draft Land and Resource Management Plan for the Prescott National Forest (proposed revised plan) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Prescott National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (DEIS) was published in the Federal Register on

August 25, 2012. The NOA announced the availability of these documents for review and asked for public feedback during the 90-day formal comment period which ended November 28, 2012.

The Prescott NF encouraged reviewers to submit substantive comments which could be used to modify alternatives, evaluate new alternatives, improve or modify the analysis, and make factual corrections. Review documents, including a reader's guide, were made available on the Prescott NF plan revision Web site. Public meetings were held during the comment period (October 2012) in the communities of Camp Verde, Chino Valley, and Prescott to answer questions about the proposed revised plan and DEIS and to elicit feedback and comments. Based on public and leadership concerns raised during the comment period, the Prescott NF developed the preferred alternative or alternative E (see "Adjustments Made as a Result of Comments" section below for a description of alternative E).

Between draft and final versions of the revised plan and environmental impact statement, the Prescott NF engaged in formal consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and prepared a biological assessment of the preferred alternative. The biological assessment analyzed, in greater detail, the potential impacts the preferred alternative would have on federally listed wildlife species and their habitats. As part of the consultation process, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issued a biological opinion of the assessment.

A notice announcing the availability of the record of decision, the final revised plan and final environmental impact statement was published in the Federal Register in 2015. These documents were posted on the Prescott NF Web site, and hardcopies were distributed to stakeholders, tribes, local and State governments, and Federal agencies. Additional hardcopies were made available at the Prescott NF district offices in Camp Verde, Chino Valley, and Prescott.

Summary of Comments Received

Following the 90-day public comment period, the Prescott NF reviewed and analyzed correspondence from a total of 116 individuals, agencies, and organizations that included almost 800 substantive comments on various topics. Public comments were posted in their entirety on the Prescott NF plan revision Web site. Detailed comment letters were submitted by the 5 government agencies and 21 organizations listed below.

Agencies and Organizations that Submitted Comments

Access Fund	Back Country Horsemen of Arizona	International Mountain Biking Association	The Friends of Anderson Mesa
Arizona Cattle Growers Association	Center for Biological Diversity	Mingus Area Preservation Society	U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management
Arizona Game and Fish Department	Environmental Protection Agency	Prescott Open Trails Association	U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service
Arizona Wilderness Coalition	Friends of Arizona Rivers	Public Lands Council	
Arizona Wildlife Association	Friends of Arizona Trails	Sierra Club	Upper Agua Fria Watershed Partnership

Upper Verde River Watershed Coalition	Verde Valley Land Preservation Western Watersheds Project	Yavapai Cattle Growers Association Yavapai County	Yavapai Trails Association
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Common Topics and Major Concerns Identified

Several common topics were identified during the Prescott NF’s review of public comments including: wilderness recommendations, trail maintenance and development, watersheds, protection of wildlife habitat, forest access, target shooting, prescribed burning, livestock grazing, and management of the upper Verde River. A summary of the comments, including major concerns, for each topic is listed below.

- **Wilderness Recommendations** – The majority of comments received expressed a preference for or against an alternative based on the amount of wilderness recommended. Among 20 potential wilderness areas (PWAs) evaluated, 3 of the alternatives in the DEIS recommended a combination of 0 to 16 PWAs: alternative B recommended 8 PWAs, alternative C recommended 0 PWAs, and alternative D recommended 16 PWAs.
- **Trails Maintenance and Development** – Several comments from user groups and individuals expressed support for increased trails maintenance and desires for more connecting trails. There were also comments containing suggestions for addressing trail conflicts.
- **Watersheds** – Comments from environmental groups and government agencies expressed desires for more watershed protections than what is proposed in the alternatives, including an increased focus on protecting seeps and springs.
- **Protection of Wildlife Habitat** – Comments from several environmental groups asserted that the action alternatives (alternatives B, C, and D) lack sufficient protections for federally listed and sensitive wildlife species and their habitat. A related concern was raised regarding the limited selection of management indicator species.
- **Forest Access** – Several comments raised concerns about forest access, including the issue of locked gates along some National Forest System roads that cross private property.
- **Target Shooting** – Comments from several individuals focused on the need to address unsafe shooting behavior and the Prescott NF, including support for a new target shooting range.
- **Prescribed Burning** – Several comments raised concerns about health impacts associated with prescribed burning.
- **Livestock Grazing** – Some comments from environmental groups asserted that the proposed plan over emphasized livestock grazing and requested an alternative with no livestock grazing. Other comments from ranchers voiced support of using livestock grazing as a management tool.
- **Upper Verde River** – Several comments were directed at the management of the upper Verde River, including requests that the upper Verde River receive more protections.

Description of Content Analysis

The Prescott NF used a content analysis process that consisted of scanning, coding, and entering all correspondence received during the comment period into an electronic database for further sorting and analysis. This process ensured that every comment was read, analyzed, and considered. The comments that were most helpful were those that were unique and specifically related to the plan components (e.g., desired conditions, objectives, standards, etc.) or the analysis in the DEIS.

All correspondence items were assigned a unique contact number. As each correspondence was reviewed, comments were identified and numbered sequentially. Similar comments were then grouped together, and for each group, a concern statement was developed to capture the thought, idea, or issue common to all of the associated comments. The following is an example of a concern statement and a sampling of the comments that were grouped together to develop it.

Concern Statement: “The Forest Service should not recommend any Potential Wilderness Areas for wilderness designation.”

- **Comment:** “The concern I have are the PNF's proposals to create and designate more wilderness.”
- **Comment:** “One of the alternatives (Alternative B) the Forest is recommending creates eight new wilderness areas. We are adamantly opposed to any more new wilderness areas.”
- **Comment:** “We are against any efforts of the Prescott National Forest to propose more wilderness areas on the National Forest in the new Forest planning process.”

Concern statements and their corresponding responses from the Prescott NF are displayed in appendix A of the FEIS and are organized alphabetically by topic (e.g., Access, Air Quality, Climate, Fire Management, Grazing, Recreation, Watersheds, Wilderness, Wildlife, etc.). Included at the end of each concern statement, in parentheses, are numbers identifying the persons or organizations associated with each concern statement and the corresponding comment. For example, the code (11.09) identifies contact number 11 and comment number 9.

Adjustments Made as a Result of Comments Received

The Prescott NF leadership team convened in December 2012, with facilitation assistance from Southwest Decision Resources, to review concerns raised in public comments and to identify a preferred alternative. Based on constructive suggestions from the public and internal discussion, the leadership team decided to modify the wilderness recommendation and several of the objective statements in the proposed revised plan (alternative B) to form the preferred alternative (alternative E).

In general, alternative E places less emphasis on developed recreation and trail maintenance and additional guidance for watersheds, forest access, and land acquisition. Additionally, it maintains the same vegetation treatments as alternative B and has the same emphasis on pronghorn antelope and native fish habitat recovery. Specifically, the following changes were made to the proposed revised plan in response to major public concerns in order to form the preferred alternative:

- Reduced the total acreage of Potential Wilderness Areas (PWAs) recommended for wilderness designation from approximately 43,000 acres (distributed across 8 PWAs) to approximately 23,000 acres (distributed across 8 PWAs). All recommended PWAs in alternative E are extensions of existing designated wilderness.
- Modified an objective to increase the number of wildlife water developments improved or constructed from a range of 3 to 15 to up to 25 existing and 5 new water developments.
- Added an objective to act on up to 10 opportunities to secure legal access to areas where historic access to the Prescott NF has been lost.
- Added an objective to pursue at least 8 in-stream flow water rights to enable the Prescott NF to provide for channel and floodplain maintenance and recharge of riparian aquifers, as an emphasis on watershed health.

Additional changes were made to the proposed revised plan as a result of review and discussion from the Prescott NF leadership team and forest program managers:

- Modified an objective to decrease the number of developed recreation areas constructed from a range of 2 to 5 to a range of 1 to 2, shifting emphasis towards sustainable dispersed recreation opportunities in alignment with expected future program funding.
- Modified an objective that proposed developing a new target shooting area to instead emphasize implementing projects that raise awareness of responsible forestwide shooting practices rather than developing a specific shooting area.
- Clarified several of the desired conditions, objectives, standards, and guidelines with minor word changes.

A complete description of alternative E, including how it differs from the other alternatives, can be found in chapter 2 of the FEIS in the section “Alternatives Considered in Detail.”

The FEIS was adjusted to include the details of alternative E. In chapter 2, a section was added to describe how alternative E addresses the five Needs for Change and its impact on social and economic values. In chapter 3, the environmental consequences for each resource was updated to include analysis for alternative E; for most resources, the environmental consequences of alternative E are the same as or very similar to one or more of the other alternatives.

Ongoing Collaboration

The value of the collaborative approach employed during plan revision can be seen in the following ongoing efforts that had their genesis in plan revision collaboration.

Community Forest Stewardship Forum

During the early citizen engagement portion of the plan revision process and at the “*Your Forest Vision and the Way Forward*” meeting, a small but diverse group of citizens and organizations expressed a desire to continue to move the community visions forward and begin to address some of the identified issues. With assistance from the Southwest Decision Resources facilitator, a collaborative stewardship group (Stewardship Forum) self-organized out of these desires. The Stewardship Forum identified trails,

litter, and youth education as three focus areas shared in common with the Prescott NF. Sub-groups were formed around these issues and have begun work to collaborate efforts



Figure 6. Stewardship Forum summer picnic at Mingus Mountain on the Prescott NF (May 2009)

Some of the benefits realized from the formation of the Stewardship Forum include:

- Increased attendance, diversity, and engagement, at community meetings due to Stewardship Forum advertising and hosting.
- Provide a venue for community feedback on management proposals and issues

- Fosters synergy among participants for issue resolution and action
- Encourages even wider and more inclusive citizen stewardship of the forest
- Offers a potential focal point for community advocacy for the forest
- Facilitates forest/community discussions

The group's involvement in plan revision developed into a component of the Recreation Strategy effort, where strategies for managing recreation on the Prescott NF have been identified and prioritized based on community input and values.

Upper Verde River citizen proposal for designation as Wild and Scenic River

An alliance of several groups interested in the designation of the upper Verde River as a designated wild and scenic river approached the Prescott NF to share ideas and information and ensure that any proposal they made would work well from a land management standpoint. This was done well in advance of any written proposal.

Verde Front Group

A group comprised of organizations, local municipalities, agencies and citizens in the Verde Valley was interested in recreation projects and opportunities involving tracts of land newly acquired by the Prescott NF and Arizona State Parks. These acquisitions were viewed as the catalyst needed to move their community vision forward, with recreation as an initial focus. That effort (originally referred to as the Verde Front group) is being coordinated with the larger Recreation Strategy effort on the Prescott NF.

Community Forest Trust

During plan revision, participants from an existing non-profit organization (the Hyde Mountain Vista Group) offered to rename, expand their geographic scope and Board, and become a primary forestwide partner. The intent was to expand the capacity of the forest to address on-the-ground issues such as better OHV management, trail maintenance and signing, trash and litter management, and youth education. The following is an excerpt from their Web site¹¹:

The Community Forest Trust was formed in 2009 as the result of two years of dialogue involving a wide variety of stakeholders concerned with the well-being of the public lands in Yavapai County. With interactions with the Prescott NF, a community visioning effort culminated in a broad call for a new non-profit to be created that would build capacity for community members to contribute directly to the stewardship of these critical resources, both through participation in planning and in direct contributions through on-the-ground volunteer projects.

¹¹ <http://www.communityforesttrust.org>

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Supporting Documents in the Plan Record

File A-1. Timeline of Prescott National Forest Collaboration Related to Forest Plan Revision

File A-2. Community Visions

File A-3. Community Bulletin Boards Around Prescott National Forest

File A-4. Groups and Organizations Contacted Informally During Preparation for Forest Plan Revision

File A-5. Government Agencies Contacted Informally During Preparation for Forest Plan Revision

File A-6. Tribal Governments Contacted During Forest Plan Revision

File A-7. Bagdad Human Resource Unit

File A-8. Drake Human Resource Unit

File A-9. Prescott Human Resource Unit

File A-10. Lake Pleasant Human Resource Unit

File A-11. Wickenburg Human Resource Unit

Preface to Files A-7 Through A-11