

Wilderness Recommendations by Forest Plan Alternative

This document describes the wilderness recommendations included as part of three alternatives under consideration for revision of the Prescott National Forest Land Management Plan.

As part of the plan revision process, alternatives and their associated recommended wilderness areas will be forwarded to the regional forester (the deciding official) for consideration. The regional forester will choose whether or not to offer any recommended wilderness areas for further review by the Chief of the Forest Service. If the Chief elects to proceed with a wilderness recommendation, the Forest Service will complete additional detailed analysis of the trade-offs in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Although the chief can recommend areas for inclusion in the National Wilderness Preservation System, it takes an act of Congress to designate a wilderness area.

Public comments regarding any of the recommended wilderness areas will be accepted and considered throughout the plan revision process. Contact information can be found on-line at:

<http://www.fs.fed.us/r3/prescott/contact/index.shtml>

Proposed Revised Plan Alternative

The Proposed Revised Plan Alternative addresses five Need for Change topics (improving vegetation/fire conditions, maintaining watershed health, expanding recreation opportunities, improving fish and wildlife habitat, and preserving open space and scenery values). As part of this alternative, eight Potential Wilderness Areas are recommended for wilderness designation. These PWAs would provide improvements to existing Wilderness, meet Management Area desired conditions, and address public concerns, including maintaining open space in the Verde Valley and operational needs of livestock-grazing permittees.

The Proposed Revised Plan Alternative includes the following PWAs:

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| - Apache Creek A PWA | PW-03-09-001 |
| - Apache Creek B PWA | PW-03-09-002 |
| - Bald Mountain PWA | PW-03-09-005 |
| - Juniper Mesa PWA | PW-03-09-019 |
| - Castle Creek PWA | PW-03-09-008 |
| - Sycamore Canyon A PWA | PW-03-09-025 |
| - Sycamore Canyon C PWA | PW-03-09-027 |
| - Black Canyon PWA | PW-03-09-006 |

Apache Creek A, Apache Creek B, Bald Mountain, and Juniper Mesa

These PWAs were selected because they complement the desired non-motorized emphasis for the Williamson Valley North Management Area. Wilderness designation for these four areas would expand the land base for the existing Apache Creek and Juniper Mesa Wilderness areas. Sections of wilderness trails already pass through these units to access the existing wilderness, and designation would ensure continued and expanded wilderness recreation opportunities for hikers and equestrians.

Castle Creek

Castle Creek PWA was selected because it is contiguous to both the existing Castle Creek Wilderness and a Bureau of Land Management parcel that is “Managed for Wilderness Characteristics”. Wilderness designation for this area would expand the land base for the existing Castle Creek Wilderness. Expansion of Castle Creek Wilderness would enhance backcountry camping opportunities during the winter, spring, and fall because this is a low-elevation unit.

Sycamore Canyon A and Sycamore Canyon C

These two PWAs were selected to expand the existing Sycamore Canyon Wilderness. Wilderness designation for these areas would increase the land base of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness, providing more opportunities for an extended back-country wilderness experience.

Black Canyon

Black Canyon PWA was selected because there was strong support from residents of the Verde Valley for wilderness designation, and it would help support the wilderness system in the Southwest Region. Designation would bring the opportunity for a wilderness experience closer to the residents of the Verde Valley and provide protection from development within the Black Canyon viewshed.

Vegetation and Wildlife Emphasis Alternative

The Vegetation and Wildlife Emphasis Alternative also addresses the Need for Change topics identified in the Proposed Revised Plan Alternative. Its focus is on progressing towards ecological desired conditions at a faster pace by increasing the use of management activities such as prescribed fire, mechanical removal of vegetation, and aquatic habitat improvements, over more areas of the forest. Because the restrictions imposed on wilderness prohibit the use of mechanized equipment, it was determined that wilderness designation was incompatible with the goals of this alternative. Therefore, no Potential Wilderness Areas are recommended for designation in this alternative.

Recreation Emphasis Alternative

The Recreation Emphasis Alternative addresses the Need for Change topics identified in the Proposed Revised Plan Alternative, with a focus on increasing the quantity and diversity of recreation opportunities on the Prescott National Forest. As part of this alternative, sixteen Potential Wilderness Areas are recommended for wilderness designation. The existing wilderness acreage on the Prescott National Forest is almost 105,000 acres. These PWAs would add an additional 116,000 acres, for a combined total of over 220,000 acres. This expansion of the wilderness base would not come at the expense of any existing motorized recreation opportunities.

The Recreation Emphasis Alternative includes the following PWAs:

- Apache Creek A PWA	PW-03-09-001
- Apache Creek B PWA	PW-03-09-002
- Juniper Mesa PWA	PW-03-09-019
- Castle Creek PWA	PW-03-09-008
- Arnold Mesa PWA	PW-03-09-003
- Cedar Bench A PWA	PW-03-09-009
- Cedar Bench B PWA	PW-03-09-010
- Pine Mountain B PWA	PW-03-09-022
- Pine Mountain C PWA	PW-03-09-023
- Woodchute PWA	PW-03-09-028
- Sycamore Canyon A PWA	PW-03-09-025
- Sycamore Canyon B PWA	PW-03-09-026
- Sycamore Canyon C PWA	PW-03-09-027
- Ash Creek PWA	PW-03-09-004
- Fritsche B PWA	PW-03-09-013
- Muldoon PWA	PW-03-09-020

Apache Creek A, Apache Creek B, and Juniper Mesa

Wilderness designation for these four areas would expand the land base for the existing Apache Creek and Juniper Mesa Wilderness areas. Sections of wilderness trails already pass through these units to access the existing wilderness, and designation would ensure continued and expanded wilderness recreation opportunities for hikers and equestrians.

Castle Creek

Wilderness designation for this area would expand the land base for the existing Castle Creek Wilderness. Expansion of Castle Creek Wilderness would enhance backcountry camping opportunities during the winter, spring, and fall because this is a low-elevation unit.

Arnold Mesa, Cedar Bench A, and Cedar Bench B

Wilderness designation for these three areas would expand the land base for the existing Cedar Bench Wilderness and provide more opportunity for extended back-country wilderness use.

Pine Mountain B and Pine Mountain C

Wilderness designation for these two areas would expand the land base for the existing Pine Mountain Wilderness.

Woodchute

Wilderness designation for this area would expand the land base for the existing Woodchute Wilderness.

Sycamore Canyon A, Sycamore Canyon B, and Sycamore Canyon C

These PWAs were selected to expand the existing Sycamore Canyon Wilderness.

Wilderness designation for these areas would increase the land base of the Sycamore Canyon Wilderness, providing more opportunities for an extended back-country wilderness experience.

Ash Creek

Wilderness designation for this area would create a new wilderness area in close proximity to both the Verde Valley and the Prescott Basin. It would be well situated to serve future demands for Wilderness opportunities from the local population, the Phoenix metro area, and Flagstaff.

Fritsche B

Wilderness designation for this area would create a new Wilderness area outside of the Paulden community and help to meet a regional need for more wilderness in the Coconino Plateau Woodland.

Muldoon

The upper Verde River is eligible for Wild and Scenic River designation and Wilderness designation for this area complements the Wild river characteristics of this section.

The following PWAs are **not** included in the Recreation Emphasis Alternative:

- | | | |
|---|---------------------|--------------|
| - | Bald Mountain PWA | PW-03-09-005 |
| - | Black Canyon PWA | PW-03-09-006 |
| - | Fritsche A PWA | PW-03-09-012 |
| - | Pine Mountain A PWA | PW-03-09-021 |

Bald Mountain

Bald Mountain PWA currently contains about one and a half miles of motorized trail. Wilderness designation would require that this trail be closed to motorized use – thus representing an actual, not potential, loss of a motorized recreational opportunity.

Black Canyon

Wilderness designation for the Black Canyon PWA would preclude the future development of mountain biking opportunities in a prime area adjacent to the towns and communities within the Verde Valley.

Fritsche A

Wilderness designation for the Fritsche A PWA would limit the future development of motorized recreation opportunities in the vicinity of the Paulden community. Current use includes Off-Highway Vehicle use on area trails and for hunting access.

Pine Mountain A

Wilderness designation for the Pine Mountain A PWA, in conjunction with Wilderness designation for Pine Mountain C, would result in private property being surrounded by Wilderness. The existing private property and access road occurs within the boundaries for Pine Mountain A, therefore, it would be better to designate Pine Mountain C, north of FR 68, and maintain FR 68 for access to the area.