

Programmatic Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Land Management Plan

Apache, Coconino, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties, Arizona

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Abstract: To comply with the National Forest Management Act and address changes that have occurred over the past 25 years, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests propose to revise the current land management plan (1987 plan). This programmatic draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) documents analysis of the impacts of four alternatives developed for programmatic management of the 2.1 million acres administered by the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs.

The DEIS documents the analysis of all alternatives and the associated environmental consequences at a programmatic level. The preferred alternative (alternative B) analyzed in this DEIS and reflected in the accompanying “Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Proposed Land Management Plan,” would guide all natural resource management activities on the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests. This alternative addresses new information and concerns received since the 1987 plan was published, and it meets objectives of Federal laws, regulations, and policies.

Comments: It is important that reviewers provide their comments at such times and in such a way that are useful to the Agency’s preparation of the final environmental impact statement. Therefore, comments should be provided prior to the close of the comment period and should clearly articulate the reviewer’s concerns and contentions. The submission of timely and specific comments can affect a reviewer’s ability to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial review. Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will

not provide the respondent with standing to participate in subsequent administrative or judicial reviews.

Send Comments to:

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Summary

The Forest Service proposes to implement a new land management plan for the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests (Apache-Sitgreaves NFs or the forests). The area affected by the proposal includes the approximately 2.1 million acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands known as the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs, located in Apache, Coconino, Greenlee, and Navajo Counties in Arizona. This proposal does not include Apache National Forest lands located in New Mexico; those lands are managed according to the Gila National Forest land management plan.

This action is needed because the National Forest Management Act of 1976 requires land management plans to be revised every 10 to 15 years, and the current management direction for the forests under the 1987 Apache-Sitgreaves NFs plan (1987 plan) is 25 years old. It no longer addresses changes that have occurred to economic, social, and ecological conditions; new policies and priorities; and new information based on monitoring and scientific research. For example, invasive species are a current threat to forest health where invasive plants infest over 30,000 acres of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. At the time the 1987 plan was approved, invasive species were not a concern.

Extensive public involvement and collaboration on the revision of the 1987 plan preceded publication of this DEIS. Informal discussions with the public regarding needed changes to the 1987 plan began with a series of public meetings during the summer of 2006. From 2006 to 2012, multiple meetings, correspondence, news releases, comment periods, and other tools were utilized to gather feedback from the public, forest employees, tribes, Federal and State agencies, and local governments. As a culmination of these public involvement efforts, the forests have developed this programmatic draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) to examine potential alternatives for a new land management plan.

The four alternatives evaluated include:

- Alternative A is the no action alternative and represents the 1987 plan, as amended. This alternative would continue to guide management of the Apache-Sitgreaves NFs. Alternative A emphasizes timber management as a primary tool for providing forest products for local and regional industrial and individual needs while meeting wildlife habitat needs.
- Alternative B is the proposed action (proposed plan) and the preferred alternative. This alternative was designed to address the needs for change by addressing the demand for wildlife habitat, community protection, commodity outputs, and recreation opportunities with an emphasis on ecological restoration.
- Alternative C responds to public comments that forest management should provide increased benefits to local communities through management emphasis on commodity outputs and motorized and developed recreation. There is an emphasis on contributing to local and regional economic sustainability through ecological restoration
- Alternative D responds to public comments that forest management should emphasize more natural processes and nonmotorized and dispersed recreation opportunities. There is an emphasis on ecological restoration across all vegetation types.

This DEIS provides more detailed descriptions of each alternative and discloses the potential environmental consequences related to implementing each alternative. Based upon the effects of the alternatives, the responsible official will decide whether to implement the preferred alternative

Summary

(alternative B), modify the proposed plan to meet the purpose and need through some other combination of management direction, select another alternative, or take no action at this time.

