

Summary of the Proposal for the Sedona Administrative Site Sale Coconino National Forest

Purpose and Need

Background

This proposal is a result of special legislation, the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act of 2000, P.L. 106-458 passed in November 2000, which allows the Forest Service to exchange or sell several sites in various locations in Arizona and use the proceeds of those sales to acquire, construct or improve administrative facilities. This legislation responded to a long standing issue of Verde Valley Forest Service offices being in locations that do not best serve National Forest or public purposes and limited funding for administrative site facilities construction. Proceeds from land sales in combination with Forest Service funding will be used to build ranger station facilities at new sites in the Verde Valley starting in Fall 2005. The Sedona Ranger Station site was identified in the legislation: This is a 21 acre parcel on Brewer Road in Sedona where the existing Red Rock Ranger District (Coconino National Forest) office is located.

Purpose and Need for Action

There is a need for the Forest Service to use the Arizona National Forest Improvement Act legislation to sell the Sedona Ranger Station location in order to obtain funding to build Verde Valley administrative facilities in locations that better serve the public. This action is needed, because the existing Sedona Ranger Station location is not able to provide quality public service or employee work conditions due to their locations and poor facilities. Congress passed this legislation in recognition of limited funding available to construct new facilities. This legislation allows for income derived from the sales of identified properties to be used in construction of new facilities that better provide for public service. This action responds to the goals and objectives outlined in the Coconino National Forest Plan, and helps to promote overall implementation of the Forest Plan by providing quality administrative facilities that better serve the public and meet administrative service needs. The Coconino Forest Plan under FA&O Facility Maintenance Guidelines (page 90) states “Pursue exchange of the existing Sedona Administrative Site for office, warehouse and parking facilities,” as well as identifying the parcel as base for exchange by meeting met one or more of the criteria under the Landownership Planning/Land Classification standards and guidelines (page 86) for possible conveyance to private ownership. This project also helps to implement the standard and guideline under General Administration that states “Maintain an aggressive and pro-active public affairs program, Forest-wide, to establish and maintain informed consent for resource management objectives.”

Proposed Action

The Forest Service proposes to sell through a competitive process the 21-acre Sedona Ranger Station and use the funds derived from these sales to build administrative facilities in new locations to meet the purpose and need. The result of the sale of this site would likely be some form of private development as allowed through the local government jurisdictional development process, City of Sedona.

Decision Framework

Given the purpose and need, the deciding official reviews the proposed action and the other alternatives in order to make the following decisions:

- Should the ranger station site be sold?
- Should any parts be excluded from the sale?
- Should the site be sold with restrictions or limitations?

The deciding official may choose either the no action alternative or the proposed action that includes mitigation to protect resources. Issues were not identified that required an alternative to exclude portions of the Red Rock Ranger Station site.

Public Involvement

The proposal was listed in the Coconino National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions starting in July 2003. The proposal was provided to the public and other agencies for comment during scoping in November and December 2003. As part of the public involvement process, the agency sent to adjacent landowners and interested parties describing the proposal as well as a news release was distributed announcing the proposal and asking for comments. In addition, a local Sedona group (Sedona Women) has sponsored several meetings that discussed the proposal and future considerations on the Sedona site that were open to the public. Initially this project was announced to the public in combination with the Verde Ranger Station site sale in Camp Verde. These two projects have since been split into two separate project analyses and will have two separate decisions.

Using the comments from the public, other agencies, including the City of Sedona and adjacent property owners (see *Issues* section), the interdisciplinary team developed a list of issues to address.

Issues

The Forest Service separated the issues into two groups: significant and non-significant issues. Significant issues were defined as those directly or indirectly caused by implementing the proposed action. Non-significant issues were identified as those: 1) outside the scope of the proposed action; 2) already decided by law, regulation, Forest 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 Council for Environmental Quality (CEQ) NEPA regulations require this delineation in Sec. 1501.7, "...identify and eliminate from detailed study the issues which are not significant or which have been covered by prior environmental review (Sec. 1506.3)..." A list of non-significant issues and reasons regarding their categorization as non-significant may be found at [X] in the project record.

As for significant issues, the Forest Service identified [1] topic raised during scoping. These issues include:

[Historical and Cultural Resources]: *Sale of the Sedona Ranger Station site could result in loss or removal of cultural resources, including historical buildings at Sedona and their historic connection with the development of Sedona.* This issue would be analyzed with how well the alternatives address preservation of the historic facilities and meet the objectives of the federal cultural resource laws. The Sedona site will likely be sold with a requirement for preservation of the historic ranger station buildings. The historic pumphouse will require documentation per historic preservation laws anticipating potential demolition once the Forest Service no longer uses the facility and it would revert to private ownership. The City of Sedona has designated all three buildings (barn, ranger house and pumphouse) as City historical landmarks which are specifically protected under City ordinance.

There were several other comments made that were not considered significant issues but were considered in the process. They include scenery, land values, traffic, light, and noise. These were not considered significant issues because they are mostly outside of the scope of this analysis, which includes things that are administered or controlled by other entities. The ultimate development and impacts of development of the site are the overseen by the local jurisdiction, the City of Sedona. Water use, noise, traffic, lighting and scenery are concerns that the City will consider when determining the types of development that will be allowed on the property once it is out of federal ownership. The City's existing public process would be used to determine what would be developed on the site and would address concerns.

Some adjacent owners commented that they were interested in acquiring small pieces of the site to combine with their existing property. This analysis only describes the effects of the sale of the property and not how the process will occur or if the property will be sold in smaller increments. Owners could negotiate a purchase from the successful bidder or participate in the bidding process themselves. At this time, the sale is expected to occur as one single property and not in separate pieces since it allows the most flexibility for development and therefore likely the best return of value to the United States.

Alternatives

This section describes and compares the alternatives considered for the Sedona Administrative Site Sale project. It includes a description and map of the proposed action alternative and the No Action alternative considered. This section also presents the alternatives in comparative form, sharply defining the differences between each alternative and providing a clear basis for choice among options by the decision maker and the public.

Alternative 1 - No Action

Under the No Action alternatives, current management plans would continue to guide management of the project areas. No sale of the current administrative site at Sedona would be implemented to accomplish project goals. New administrative facilities for the Red Rock Ranger District would likely not be built in the short term due to limited funding availability for new facilities. This alternative does not accomplish the Purpose and Need of obtaining funds to build administrative facilities in a location that better serves the public.

Alternative 2 - The Proposed Action

Alternative 2: The Forest Service proposes to sell the 21-acre Sedona Ranger Station site in Sedona and use the proceeds to build new administrative facilities that better serve the public. This alternative includes mitigation measures that would protect and preserve National Register

Eligible Historic buildings. The alternative does proceed with sale of the entire property with appropriate other requirements that would protect both of the City historic landmarks buildings (ranger house and barn/warehouse building). This protection would be as required under the existing ordinances of the City of Sedona for City designated historical landmarks. The site would be developed as approved through a City of Sedona planning process, which could include uses under the existing approved land use of community facilities and residential or other uses if approved through a Community Plan amendment process in the future.

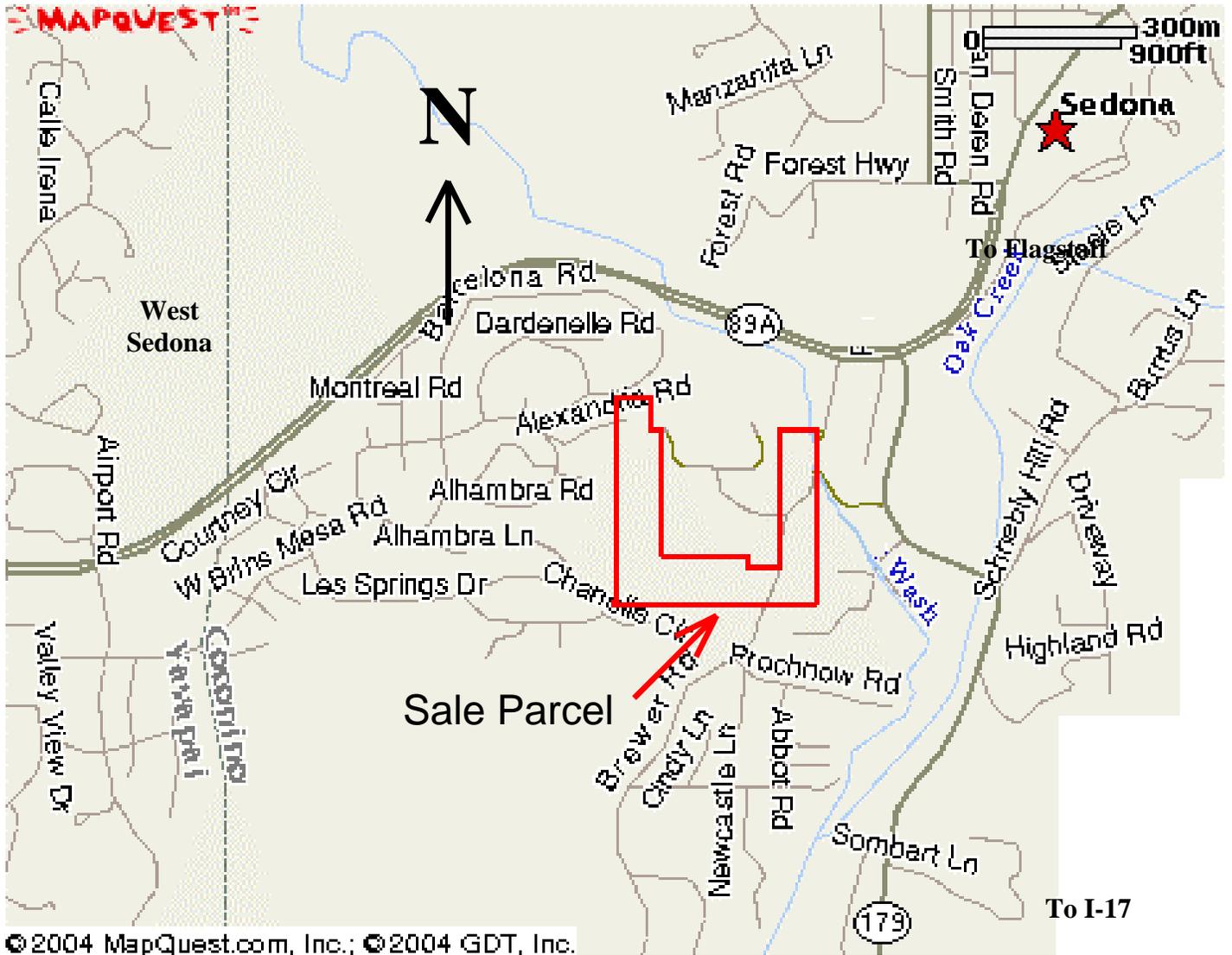


Figure 1. Red Rock Ranger Station (Alternative 2)

Mitigation Measures Common to All Alternatives

In response to public comments on the proposal, mitigation measures were developed to ease some of the potential impacts the various alternatives may cause. The mitigation measures may be applied to any of the action alternatives.

- The actual sale process will not be determined in this decision. The sale process may require changes to obtain the best value and return to the government. Options for the sale process could likely include a competitive bidding process, negotiated sale, sale of only a portion of the properties, sales at different timeframes or a possibility of multiple methods of sale. At this time, the preferred method is for a competitive sale process.
- Existing permitted uses other than grazing activities will be protected under the sales at both sites. This would include utility and road corridors that have existing permits or easements authorizing the use of the federal lands.
- Existing land ordinances and regulations would be applied by the local government jurisdictions after sale of the properties. Future uses and development will be managed under those regulations and ordinances, including floodplain ordinances that protect 100 year floodplain.
- The sale of the property into private ownership will require the protection of the two historic buildings on the property to be protected under the City of Sedona's ordinances relating to Designated Sedona Historic Landmarks. The City's Land Development code, Article 15 empowers the Historic Preservation Commission duties related to designated landmarks that would protect them. The historic ranger house and barn/warehouse building are both Designated Sedona Historic Landmarks. A Historic Properties Management Plan will define the important elements of these structures that would require preservation in order to protect the National Register listing potential. Future uses or other activities associated with these buildings would be reviewed and approved by the City of Sedona under the City's ordinance. The Arizona State Historic Preservation Office would also be involved in monitoring the preservation of these buildings.

Comparison of Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the effects of implementing each alternative. Information in the table is focused on activities and effects where different levels of effects or outputs can be distinguished quantitatively or qualitatively among alternatives.

Table 1. Comparison of Effects

	Altern. 1 – No Action	Altern. 2 – Proposed Action
Cultural Resources	On-going use of historic buildings, subject to archeological regulations regarding adaptive reuse.	Likely adaptive reuse of buildings by buyer. Protection of these resources would be administered by the City of Sedona Historic Preservation Commission consistent with City ordinances that protect these designated City Historical Landmarks.
Management Indicator Species	Undeveloped areas could provide habitat for MIS species.	Sale of the property and potential loss of habitat will not contribute to downward trend of MIS species.
Special Status Species	Existing management would continue that has little impact on special status species.	Post disposal activities could result in minor impacts to foraging peregrines and minor loss of habitat for some species.
Soil & Water	Forest Service use would continue with similar uses.	Development would occur that would change native vegetation but floodplain regulations would protect water quality and other resources. There would be increased use of water and sewer disposal needs depending on the development approved by the City of Sedona.
Scenery	Existing uses would remain depending on how the administrative site would be used into the future. A portion of the site would likely remain in undeveloped, natural setting.	Development on the undeveloped area would change the appearance in those areas depending on the requirements placed on the buyer by the City of Sedona. Current historical buildings would remain and other facilities would likely be developed replacing existing facilities, again under City of Sedona ordinances.
Vegetation/ Invasive species	Site managed as currently continued use and maintenance of existing vegetation including some control of invasive species	Construction activities during development could result in loss of native vegetation depending on the proposed development. Invasive weeds may be spread.
Other land use issues	Uses would likely remain the same with possible need for further development on the ranger station developed area to better meet Forest Service needs. No change in other uses likely. As use continues to grow, traffic impacts of visitors is likely to increase.	Land use values would likely not be impacted as the use of the property would be similar to adjacent lands. Traffic could increase depending on the approved development of the land by the City of Sedona. Traffic and other issues would be considered during the City's development process and the public can participate to determine the ultimate use of the site.