D R A F T
Feb 9, 2004 Version

RECREATION and AESTHETICS

SCOPE OF THE ANALYSIS
The scope of the Recreation and Aesthetics portion of this analysis is limited to Anderson Mesa and it's immediate surroundings. Analysis here of recreation and aesthetic resources that are outside the Anderson Mesa LSA boundary would be dependent on linkages between the mesa and the adjacent areas, e.g. visual links, trail links, etc.

FOREST LAND MANAGEMENT PLAN DIRECTION
The 1987 Coconino National Forest Land Management Plan (FLMP) provides management direction for Anderson Mesa, both in general Forest-wide standards and guidelines, and with more specific standards and guidelines for each "Management Area" (MA), a classification system based mostly on vegetation types.

Significant Issues from the FLMP
The FLMP identified eleven significant forest wide issues (FLMP p5), two of which – availability of recreation options and off-road vehicle use - are relative to the recreation portion of this analysis and planning effort, and are addressed in more detail here.

General FLMP Management Direction
General management direction for Outdoor Recreation (FLMP Amendment No. 9, p22) that is contained in the FLMP and is relative to this planning process includes:

- Manage the recreation resource to increase opportunities for a wide variety of developed and dispersed experiences,
- Maintain and enhance visual resource values by including visual quality objectives in resource planning and management activities,
- Provide visitor information services (VIS) to interpret the resources, uses and management of the forest.
- Maintain a variety of trails that include foot, horse, bike and motorized opportunities,
- Integrate the Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) system into the planning process to quantify changes, guide management, and coordinate recreation with other resources,
- Manage off-road driving to provide opportunities while protecting resources and minimizing conflicts with other users.

Forest-wide Standards and Guidelines
Forest wide standards and guidelines (FLMP Amendment No. 9, p51) relative to this planning effort, and summarized here, are:

- Review the ROS inventory as a part of project planning and make necessary corrections and refinements. Use the ROS inventory to analyze impacts to ROS

classes due to management activities such as timber sales, range projects, and firewood sales. ROS classes are used in developing decisions on road standards and density.

- Manage dispersed recreation areas for safety, resource protection, and capacity monitoring.
- Review and update the Off-Road Driving Implementation Schedule, and amend as needed to prevent resource damage and user conflicts. Areas are closed to off-road driving when adverse resource impacts occur, when conflicts with the minimum management requirements occur, or if areas are too sensitive to withstand driving.
- Develop and sign an appropriate series of off-road driving loop trails to disperse use and provide a variety of experiences in coordination with the ROS classes.
- Repair off-road vehicle damage where cost effective and unacceptable environmental damage is occurring. Implement appropriate measures to prevent or minimize damage.
- Off-road driving restrictions may be either on a year-round or seasonal basis, and areas may be seasonally closed to provide opportunities for recreation in a setting without vehicular disturbance.
- Projects are planned to meet or exceed Visual Quality Objectives (VQO).
- Review the VQO inventory as a part of project planning and make necessary corrections and refinements following field checking.
- Improve visual resources through range and wildlife tank rehabilitation for tanks that do not provide reliable water, following transfer of water rights to reliable sites.

MA's of Anderson Mesa

Much of the land area of Anderson Mesa is listed in the FLMP under two MA's: MA7 – Pinyon-juniper Lands On Less Than 40% Slopes, and MA10 – Grassland and Sparse Pinyon-Juniper Above the (Mogollon) Rim. These two MA's comprise approximately 80% of the Anderson Mesa area. The balance of the mesa area is listed under MA3 – Ponderosa Pine < 40% Slope, MA4 – Ponderosa Pine > 40% Slope, MA6 – Unproductive Timber Land, MA8 – Pinyon-Juniper Woodland > 40% Slope, MA12 – Riparian and Open Water, and MA15 – Developed Recreation Sites.

Standards and Guidelines for Each MA

Management Area-specific standards and guidelines that are pertinent to recreation and aesthetic aspects of MA's of the Anderson Mesa LSA are summarized here:

- MA3 (ponderosa pine <40% slope) - Manage dispersed recreation to established standards for health and safety, user experience, and resource protection. Visual quality objectives are generally Modification and Partial Retention. Maintain or create a mosaic of stands of various sizes and age classes throughout the rotation. Obtain diversity of landscape management features.
- MA4 (ponderosa pine >40% slope) - Emphasize dispersed recreation. VQO's in this area vary, and are managed in accordance with forest-wide standards and guidelines.

- MA7 (pinyon-juniper woodland <40% slope) – Traditional uses have included hunting, pinyon nut gathering, firewood cutting, and Christmas tree cutting. Manage for the VQO's outlined in the forest inventory (as updated), including a configuration and design of openings, which is (sic) consistent with the characteristic landscape. For foreground area treatment, avoid patterns that represent "farmed" or human made appearance, retain the natural aspect of the original vegetation type, feather edges of treatment, leave islands or peninsulas in treated areas.
- MA8 (pinyon-juniper woodland >40% slopes) – Emphasize dispersed recreation. VQO's in this area vary, and are managed in accordance with forest-wide standards and guidelines (as updated).
- MA12 (riparian and open water) – Emphasize visual quality. Among other things, riparian areas provide important recreation opportunity because of the water. Emphasize dispersed recreation, including wildlife and fishing, on the open water portion. Consider ROS class demand and distribution, wildlife and fisheries habitat needs, user safety and enjoyment, and cost effectiveness of management practices.
- MA15 (developed recreation sites) – People are attracted to these areas because of sites near water, climatic relief from heat, and high degree of scenic quality. Manage for the VQO's of Retention and Partial Retention (as updated). Construct, reconstruct, or expand sites according to approved site plans and as funding permits. Utilize opportunities to relocate existing facilities out of riparian habitat and wetlands where it can be done cost-effectively and still provide adequate opportunities for forest recreation.

Other Planning and Management Direction for the Area

Over the years, various Forest Service management plans have provided general direction for management of recreation resources on the mesa, and are useful in understanding past recreation management emphasis for Anderson Mesa.

- The 1932 (revised 1940) Coconino National Forest (CNF) 'Forest Recreation Plan' recognized several places on the mesa as a part of what was called 'Division 5', and included management information and direction for Ashurst Cabin, Ashurst Lake, Vail Lake, Chavez Well Forest Camp, Long Lake, Long Lake Summer Home Group, and Soldier Lake and Soldier Lake Annex. In general, direction in this plan was for development of these areas within such constraints as the amount of water flowing from springs or available from wells. While the 1932 plan contained no specific discussion of Anderson Mesa proper, the direction outlined for each area listed above indicated the forest considered the mesa area to be an important part of the overall recreation management picture.

- The 1964 CNF Recreation Management Plan went into greater depth in terms of identifying areas, user groups and populations, types of use, etc. It says that "Anderson Mesa has two very good fishing lakes and more could be developed. The lakes are Ashurst and Kinnikinick. To provide

good camping and picnicking, sites will be developed at Post Lake and Pine Hill" (p6). The plan goes on to say that "The more easily developed lakes on Anderson Mesa have been constructed. There is a need for more good fishing lakes on the mesa. Possibilities are Deep Lake and Long Lake" (p9). "The necessity for additional (group) sites has been anticipated and a site is inventoried at Horse Lake on Anderson Mesa" (p12). Under a section titled "IV Policies and Decisions, the plan stated that "Cover manipulation (Juniper control) will not be practiced in potential recreation sites or zones" and that "Hunter camps will consist of minimum developments of a temporary and portable nature."

- The Chief of the Forest Service has identified several key issues or "threats" to the national forests – fire and fuels (restoration of healthy forests to reduce fire risk), invasive species (protection of ecosystems), loss of open space (conservation of lands susceptible to subdivision and development), and unmanaged recreation (regulate the use of OHV's). At least the last three issues relate directly to recreation management on Anderson Mesa, and could influence the selection of management alternatives.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Overview

While other areas of the surrounding regional landscape often dominate the view and receive more recreational use, Anderson Mesa, with its broad, difficult-to-access topography, and with 320 inventoried water bodies, has long been used for recreational activities such as hunting, driving for pleasure, fishing, camping, wildlife viewing, etc. Use numbers have typically been low over the years, with the exception of high use around lakes and developed recreation sites on the mesa, and where access has been improved, but this has been changing in recent years as the population has increased, other more popular areas have become crowded, and Anderson Mesa has been discovered and is receiving increasing recreational use.

In recent years, as local, state and regional populations have boomed, use of Anderson Mesa for both traditional types of recreational uses and new recreational uses has changed and use has increased dramatically. Because of this, the mesa area has become an important part of the larger forest recreation management picture. Some long-time uses, such as hunting and wildlife viewing, have increased steadily over the years. New uses of the mesa include OHV riding and driving, mountain biking, climbing, orienteering, geo-caching, and others, and use is increasing each year. This increased use, often un-managed, has resulted in impacts ranging from more negligible ones in remote areas, such as occasional un-maintained campfire rings, to significant impacts from rutted roads and travel routes in the "front country" and other parts of the area. Impacts are more significant, too, in areas with higher-use dispersed campsites where there are multiple un-maintained campfire rings, litter, and soil and vegetation damage appearing

due to increasing use, or areas of the mesa where greater levels of development or accessibility exist.

While fifty years ago there was very little recreational development on Anderson Mesa, and due to it's remoteness and accessibility it received little recreational use, today the mesa area is dotted with developed recreation sites around it's larger lakes, popular for water-based activities that are in short supply, and the "backcountry" parts of the mesa supply the remote areas and challenges some people seek for recreation, some of them displaced from other nearby more popular areas. In sum, this makes Anderson Mesa an important part of the full-spectrum recreation management picture for the forest.

Recreation Use Data

In the recent past Anderson Mesa was a remote, little used part of the forest, with the exception of high summer time use at a few developed recreation sites. In recent years the area has become popular for the other types of recreation uses that are described above, but because of this, little recreation use data has been collected over the years for most of the activities. The use data and information that has been collected at the developed recreation sites in the area has for the most part only been collected sporadically. Also, the systems for collecting and reporting this information have changed through the years, too, often making it difficult to correlate information and trends, and to make accurate use projections. Because use information is critical to this analysis in order to determine recreation-related management actions, the following data and estimates, while not fully displaying use trends, will be considered in order to assess recreation use of the mesa area.

Information shown is taken from Recreation Information Management (RIM) data from 1960 through the mid-1980's when reporting through RIM stopped, from data received from Recreation Resource Management (RRM - the private concessionaire operating Ashurst, Forked Pine, and Kinnikinick Campgrounds), from High Country Recreation (campground concessionaire from 1986 through 1997), and from managers estimates.

Developed Recreation

Developed recreation sites on Anderson Mesa include trailheads, boat launches, and campgrounds.

A trailhead/parking area is located at the Jack's Canyon Climbing Area on the south side of Jacks Canyon, north of State Highway 87. Built recently, it was constructed in response to rapidly increasing climbing use in Jack's Canyon. This site is expected to receive increasing use in the future, too, as a number of widely available published climbing guides that list the area have popularized it as a great place to climb year-round. Users are coming mostly from local and statewide points, but they also come from across the nation and around the world. The access road into the climbing area from State Highway 87 is an un-improved route. A toilet is located at the trailhead. Use for this facility is year-round, but heaviest use comes from about March through November. Total use for the year is estimated at approximately 2,500 climber user days, and 600

overnight dispersed camping days (a user day is defined as a count of the total number of visitors at a site in a twenty-four hour period). Recreational use of this area ten years ago is estimated to have been less than 200 users per year, since in general sport climbing had not become popular yet, the area population was smaller, and few if any guidebooks existed at the time directing people to climbing areas such as Jack's Canyon. A decade ago the area was known by hunters, and by backcountry enthusiasts who learned it was a Wilderness Study Area/Inventoried Roadless Area (see below).

There are four other developed trailheads in the analysis area, one at Marshall Lake, Prime Lake, a trailhead along FR82, and one at Horse Lake; all four serve the Arizona Trail. These trailheads have all been built since 1995, are in fair to good condition, need surfacing materials in a few places, and a minor amount of signing at each site. Each needs significant improvement of on-site interpretation facilities. Recreational use of these four trailheads is estimated to be 2050 user days per year for Marshall Lake, 550 user days at Prime Lake, 600 days at the trailhead on FR82, and 2400 user days at Horse Lake. Total estimated trail user days for these four trailheads is 5600 user days.

The Hay Lake Focus Group, comprised of numerous parties interested in management of the large Hay Lake parcel of land that recently changed from private ownership to national forest, has identified a number of situations within the newly acquired area and other surrounding forest lands that need attention, one of which is recreation access. At issue is the current difficult access to Long Lake, Soldier Lake, Soldier Annex Lake, and Tremaine Lake due to the low standard of roads in the area. The Forest Service, Arizona Game and Fish Department, and Natural Resources Conservation Service would like to improve access to the roads in the area, particularly to Tremaine Lake, where the group would like to construct an accessible fishing dock and boat launch.

Three developed campgrounds are located within the planning area - Kinnikinick Lake, Ashurst Lake, and Forked Pine Campgrounds. All three sites are circa-1950/1960 constructed sites, and are scheduled for reconstruction during the next five to ten years, depending on funding. The major draw for these sites over the years has been for trout fishing. Both Ashurst Lake and Kinnikinick Lake are popular for trout fishing, as they are some of the best waters for this in the Flagstaff and western Mogollon Rim area.

Ashurst Lake Campground, built cooperatively with the Arizona Game and Fish Department in 1956, was designed for the type of family tent and truck camper overnight use that was predominant at the time, but the campgrounds layout is not suitable for today's larger RV's and travel trailers. The several toilets at the campground are outdated and in disrepair, too, including not meeting today's standards for "sweet smelling toilets" (SST). Over the years, loss of the large juniper trees around the lake and camp area has resulted in less summertime shading and a corresponding reduction in recreational use. Day use for fishing has been popular at the lake and has been increasing over the years, as the lake has been one of the few reliable fishing waters around, especially for trout. When this campground began to be operated by a private

concessionaire in 1985, conflicts between day and overnight users resulted, and subsequent work with user groups and the Arizona Game and Fish Department resulted in the idea to move both Ashurst and Forked Pine Campgrounds away from the lake.

Total recreational use (camping, picnicking, etc.) at the two Ashurst Lake campgrounds for 1980 was estimated to be 54,100 Recreation Visitor Days (an RVD represents one person recreating for any portion of time in a twelve-hour period; info taken from RIM reports), which would equate to approximately *108,200 user days*. In 1990, it is estimated that camping use at the two campgrounds totaled 30,169 RVD's, or about 60,338 user days (High Country Recreation records), and about 8,000 day-use user days, for a total of *68,338 user days* that year. The 2003 total for use at the two sites (from RRM records) are 9,567 user days of overnight use, and 9,000 day-use user days, for a total of *18,567 user days* for the year. These figures display a gradual reduction in use of the facility as it has degraded over the years, particularly for overnight camping use, while dispersed camping use along Ashurst Lake Road has increased correspondingly, and use has increased at nearby Pinegrove Campground.

With the current poor condition of the campgrounds at Ashurst Lake, many people wanting a pleasant camping experience now camp in one of several dispersed recreation sites along FR82E Ashurst Lake Road instead of using Ashurst or Forked Pine campgrounds. Because of this, and with construction of a third camping loop being considered for nearby Pinegrove Campground, discussion is underway about the feasibility of combining planning efforts for the three sites to determine if alternatives exist that can help satisfy current and future recreation needs in this area. An initial idea being discussed is to convert Ashurst and Forked Pine Campgrounds to day use sites and make the Pinegrove Campground third loop expansion large enough to accommodate needed overnight capacity for the area.

Kinnikinick Lake Campground, located on the south shore of Kinnikinick Lake, was built in the 1960's, and has been popular over the years as the lake is a good trout fishery. The campground facility is in poor to fair condition. With it's rustic, more primitive-end facilities and nine-mile drive from FH3 over rough road to get to the site, it has served as a facility that offers remoteness and challenge, with the reward of good fishing for a specific segment of the recreating public that seeks such opportunities. Total use at the site in 1980, including camping and day-use, was estimated to be 19,000 RVD's, or 38,000 user days (RIM); in 1990 the figure was 27,300 (High Country Recreation, estimate), and in 2003 use totaled 4,450 user days, down due to drought, perhaps.

A special use-authorized organizational camp, Elks Picnicground, is located on the north side of Highway 87 east of Blue Ridge Ranger Station, with a toilet and cooking and picnicking facilities. Use of this facility is estimated to be approximately 1,100 user days per year.

Most of the developed recreation sites on the mesa have existed for many years, and impacts to important site vegetation from humans (e.g. vandalism, soil compaction

and resultant root damage, etc.) and natural causes (e.g. drought, insects) has resulted in loss of vegetation – particularly trees - at some sites. No vegetation management plans that would provide for effective management and protection and maintenance of resources have been prepared for the sites.

Dispersed Recreation

Use of Anderson Mesa for dispersed recreation purposes is perhaps the most popular recreational use overall, including for hunting big game, waterfowl, small game, upland game birds, driving for pleasure, camping, wildlife viewing, OHV driving and riding, mountain biking, and rock climbing. While overall dispersed recreation use across the mesa is relatively light, fluctuating on a seasonal basis, the broad expanse of the mesa with it's various interesting attributes for dispersed recreation activities make this area very popular for these types of uses.

Use estimates for the area each year for dispersed recreation are hunting of all types, primarily August through December – 12,000 user days, driving for pleasure, primarily April through December – 38,300 user days, dispersed camping from April through November – 20,100 user days, wildlife viewing (in addition to other uses described above) – 12,000 user days, and mountain biking – 3600 user days. OHV use and climbing use are shown separately in this document.

Access to the mesa in general is not easy - easy access is limited to several developed roads – FR128 (Marshall Lake), FR82E (Ashurst Lake), FR's 125 & 82 (Kinnikinick Lake), FR125 (Twin Arrows to Mormon Lake), FR82 (Long Lake), and FR69B (Chavez Pass), and dispersed recreational use, other than for big game hunting and OHV riding, is mostly limited to the main roads and to secondary, less-developed roads that originate from these roads. The balance of roads on Anderson Mesa are, for the most part, significantly less developed, are most often un-constructed, rocky, rough and rutted roads that are used mostly during the fall by big game hunters, or by grazing permittees during the summer. The result of this is a large, relatively low-use, difficult to access area from the standpoint of dispersed recreation opportunity and use. Although overall dispersed recreational use of the area has increased through time, most of the backcountry of the mesa area is relatively little used for dispersed recreation. In particular, lakes, canyons, and pine stringer areas in the backcountry of Anderson Mesa see more dispersed use, especially for camping. Long Lake, although it doesn't have a campground or other developed site on it, is popular for fishing, as are some of the other lakes in the vicinity.

Camping use levels along the major routes that are described above is moderate, as determined by the campfire rings inventoried during the fall of 2002 for this analysis, with approximately two to eight campsites per mile of road, and within view of the road. Predictably, the density of campsites is higher near developed areas, e.g. along paved roads, near campgrounds and lakes, etc. Noted high-use campsite problem areas are along FR128 at Marshall Lake, FR 125 on it's west end near Mormon Lake, FR82E

(Ashurst Lake Road), FR126 at the forest boundary, FR82 near Long Lake, and FR69B at Chavez Pass, where multiple un-maintained campsites may be found.

Because most dispersed campsites in the area are not routinely maintained, resource problems are often associated with the sites, except for the scattered, more remote sites. In particular, multiple fire rings with ash and litter exist at many sites, and there is often multiple, sometimes-braided roadways leading from the main travel route to the campsite, often with vegetation and soil damage. Some higher use sites suffer from health and sanitation issues, particularly during the busy part of the use season, as no toilets exist at these sites and few people either bring self-contained vehicles or portable toilets.

Special Uses and Lands Administration

Anderson Mesa is popular for two types of recreation special uses – guided hunting trips and dog trials. With the mesa area serving as prime fall and winter elk habitat, it is one of the more popular elk hunting units in the state during the fall hunting season. Because of the rugged terrain and vastness of the area, many people who are drawn for elk hunting tags there, not knowing the area, seek one of the numerous permitted private outfitter/guides who are issued statewide outfitter/guide permits for this activity – approximately thirty people have outfitter/guide permits for the area.

Several hunting dog field trials are permitted each year in the mesa area to a statewide club. With most of the mesa lakes being ephemeral, and considering the regional drought that started a few years ago, and given the importance of all water bodies on the mesa for wildlife and people, the permitting of field trials in the area has been limited to lakes with less sensitivity, e.g. Mud Lake, and have only been permitted at appropriate times, e.g. outside duck nesting season.

Numerous lands special uses are permitted in the area, including a high voltage 245KV power line passing from north to south through most of the area, local power and telephone lines to subdivisions and dwellings, irrigation ditches in the Long Lake area, a few waterlines associated with grazing permits, and road use agreements and authorizations for subdivisions and private land owners, particularly in the south end of the area. Lowell Observatory and the U.S. Navy operate an astronomical observatory site with multiple types of telescopes in the Prime Lake area at the north side of the analysis area. The Arizona Game and Fish Department has permits for operation of several dams in the area, including at Ashurst and Kinnikinick Lakes.

Numerous private land islands within the national forest boundary exist throughout the analysis area, and range in size from about forty to one thousand acres. Additionally, significant amounts of private land interface with national forest lands in the analysis area, particularly at the southern side. While most of these parcels are either undeveloped or have minimal development on them because of their remoteness and rough access, the rapid growth of the state and experience in other areas of the forest indicate that development of these lands could be proposed in the future. On-going and potential development of the large tracts of private land in the south end of the analysis

area, in particular, will likely present management challenges in the future, as increasing numbers of people use the forest in that area and beyond. With the importance of Anderson Mesa increasing for many resources, including for wildlife habitat and backcountry recreation experiences, development of private lands on the mesa, especially isolated parcels, could adversely affect desired management strategies if upgraded access roads were to be built to these parcels, increasing local daily use of the area and impacts.

A proposal to build a 69KV power line in the analysis area has been made, and will be addressed in a separate, site-specific analysis effort.

(Note: need review of above special uses info, add info and data, etc. from …… L. Schaal (requested 8/03), someone from R&L on MRD, and Ken Jacobs)

Rock Climbing

Rock climbing is popular in a few parts of the analysis area, particularly in the Jack's Canyon area, where use began less than ten years ago, but numerous published climbing guides have caused a dramatic increase in use here over the last few years. The climbing area is accessed from State Highway 87 between the Mogollon Ranger District office (formerly Blue Ridge RD) and Winslow. Use estimates are described above in the Developed Recreation section.

This increased use has brought with it predictable environmental consequences, including occasional overcrowding, especially on Summer weekends, health and safety issues related to the lack of toilet facilities, e.g. in the canyon bottom, soil and water impacts as trails have been developed within the roughly mile-long area of the canyon used for climbing. The road into the area from Highway 87 is about two miles long and is un-improved. As the climbing area is used year-round, the road is damaged during periods of inclement weather, e.g. when soft and muddy.

In an effort to stem damage to soil and vegetation along the rim of the canyon from uncontrolled vehicle use and camping activities, and to deal with human waste issues, the Forest Service has designated a parking area and installed a toilet at the trailhead that leads into the main part of the climbing area.

As climbing use has increased at Jack's Canyon, additional areas on the mesa have been explored and identified for climbing, with increasing use resulting as more people discover the areas and they are written up in guide books. An area just north of the current Jack's Canyon climbing area, referred to as 'Asylum', has been pioneered for climbers, and is receiving additional use. Also, additional exploring and opening of climbing routes is taking place along the east Anderson Mesa escarpment rim, on the northwest rim of the mesa southeast of 'The Pit' climbing area, and in other suitable locations. To date these expansions of climbing activities have not been controlled or impact assessments made.

Driving for Pleasure

Driving for pleasure on Anderson Mesa has been popular for many years. A 1939 Forest Service pamphlet titled "Coconino National Forest, Arizona", listing all the values

and things to do on the forest, identified nine scenic "circle drives" for people to make from Flagstaff, including to such areas as Oak Creek Canyon and Grand Canyon. One of the nine drives listed is from "Meteor Mountain" (Meteor Crater) through Chavez Pass, to the Mogollon Rim, Mormon Lake, and back to Flagstaff.

With driving for pleasure still popular today, the most often cited reasons for appreciating driving on Anderson Mesa include the wide-open vistas, lakes, and opportunities to see wildlife. While some people driving for pleasure may seek more remote, less-developed roads, most people seeking this opportunity on Anderson Mesa use the main roads, desiring half-day or full-day trips from the Flagstaff, Winslow, Blue Ridge, Mormon Lake, and other areas. The most popular routes for this activity today are Ashurst Lake Road, Long Lake Road, Twin Arrows/Kinnikinick/Mormon Lake Road, and Chavez Pass Road. Estimates of annual use are provided above in Dispersed Recreation.

OHV Use

OHV use has increased on the mesa in recent years, particularly for big game hunting, antler hunting, and recently for long-distance ATV riding. While much of this use is confined to existing roads and trails, some riding and driving, such as searching for antlers, hunting around water bodies, etc., is done off-road, and resultant impacts to wildlife, soils, water and other resources are evident, e.g. bare soil, damaged vegetation, wildlife disturbance, etc. Additionally, use of area roads and trails during periods of inclement weather or road conditions, and with un-controlled access to the area, results in damage to the roads and soil and water resources.

The on-going five-forest effort in Arizona to revise forest off-road vehicle use policy is expected to address this matter to some degree, particularly off-road driving and it's impacts. This new policy, scheduled to be implemented within a few years, may also result in a net decrease in road density in areas like Anderson Mesa, too, and thus help with the situation of deteriorating resource conditions there due to roads. If the remaining road system on Anderson Mesa is not upgraded to handle year-round motorized use, or seasonal use restrictions put into place, continued damage to road, soil and water resources can be expected.

OHV use for Anderson Mesa is estimated to be approximately 9,000 user days per year from March through December, and spread generally across the mesa area.

Motor Vehicle Restrictions/Area Closures

The Coconino National Forest LMP "Off Road Driving Management Plan" designates Ashurst Lake and Chavez Pass as two special areas on Anderson Mesa where the use of motorized vehicles is restricted to designated routes for the protection of shoreline and archaeological resources.

A special order is in place for seasonal closure of about 14,000 acres of mesa area from motorized access for critical antelope fawning habitat protection. This closure is in effect from April 15 through June 27, and the area boundary is described approximately

to be east of the 245KV power line, north of FR125, south of the Ashurst Spring and Yellow Jacket Spring area, and west of the mesa edge.

A year-round closure to motorized vehicle use protects range permittee waterline improvement corridors in lower Anderson Canyon, in Kinnikinick Canyon, and in a north and south corridor near the east forest boundary between these two canyons, and generally running between the private land parcels in this area.

A motorized vehicle closure special order to protect waterfowl nesting habitat is in effect year-round around Vail Lake, Long Lake (MLRD), Hay Lake, and Tremaine Lake.

A forest-wide order is in place for temporary vehicle restrictions (road closures) for wet or hazardous conditions in order to protect resources and public health and safety.

Hunting

While hunting occurs nearly year-round on Anderson Mesa for many species of waterfowl, small game and big game, each fall hunting use picks up dramatically, especially for big game. With a premier elk herd, and significant populations of deer, bear, antelope, and cougar, most of the Anderson Mesa area has long been a hunting area of choice. Waterfowl hunting is very popular at the numerous lakes on the mesa, too, particularly during years when sufficient moisture keeps lake levels high.

While many hunters use the mesa for day-hunting from local communities, more come from outside the local area, e.g. from Phoenix and other distant points, camping and driving in the area during their hunt. Most of the dispersed campsites discussed above began as hunter's camps, and for the most part continue to be used that way. Many of the roads on the mesa – most of them track roads – were never constructed – they are simply routes hunters have established, including to lakes for waterfowl hunting, and for big game hunting. Because of the time of year the activity usually occurs – often during late monsoon season and fall weather, when the ground is usually wet and unstable - resource damage due to the use of four-wheel drive vehicles and ATV's during these periods has increased over the years along with this activity. Damage includes rutting and erosion of soils, and destroying and trampling vegetation.

Total hunting use for all species is estimated to be 10,200 user days per year.

Fishing

Recreational fishing at Anderson Mesa lakes is very popular, since several of the lakes are the most reliable and best fishing resources in the region, particularly for cold water species such as trout. Although it's often ephemeral nature make it unpredictable, Marshall Lake has been developed and stocked with trout when water levels are suitable, and has proven to be one of the best local waters in terms of the growth of the trout due to exceptional feed production of the lake. Ashurst and Kinnikinick Lakes, along with Coconino Reservoir and Morton Lake, normally with more reliable water levels, provide good cold water fishing opportunities in the area. Long Lake and the associated lake

complex there, and several other lakes and tanks in the area, also provide both cold and warm water fishing opportunities.

As the state and region has grown, the demand for fishing opportunities has increased, too. The Forest Service and Arizona Game and Fish Department have worked together to optimize existing developed recreation lakes for fishing, within the limitation of using existing developed waters, and while considering other resource needs, too, e.g. wildlife, waterfowl nesting, etc. For example, the possibility of converting the Ashurst Lake overnight campgrounds to day-use only, primarily addressing fishing use, is being considered. Also being considered is the possibility of constructing a boat launch at Tremaine Lake near Long Lake.

Total fishing use for Anderson Mesa is estimated at 18,000 user days per year, with the primary use period being from April through October.

Non-Motorized Trail Use

One major trail, the Arizona Trail, passes through the analysis area. This long-distance non-motorized trail crosses the mesa area on its way from Mexico to Utah. The Anderson Mesa segment of this trail was only recently completed, and the whole Arizona Trail is expected to be complete within a few years. Although there is only light and sporadic use of the segment on the mesa at this time, use is expected to increase significantly once the entire trail is completed. Current use levels of the Anderson Mesa section of the trail are estimated to be approximately 1,000 users days of all types per year, and this figure is expected to increase to around 5,000 user days when the trail is completed across the state.

While no additional system trails exist on the mesa, numerous people use the area roads for cross-country and road hiking, mountain biking, exercising and horseback riding, especially in areas of interest such as canyons, where diverse vegetation exists, near lakes and communities, etc. This non-system trail use is estimated to total approximately 21,600 users per year.

Antler Collecting

Over approximately the past ten years, the collection of elk and deer antlers that are shed in late winter and early spring has become very popular on Anderson Mesa – use is estimated at 2,250 user days per year - mostly for profit and mostly for elk antlers, as dealers purchase antlers for export from the United States. No permit for this activity is required at this time. Interest in this activity has increased significantly in recent years, and today “shed hunters” search most of the area each year. The activity is typically conducted by individuals on an ATV’s roaming and gridding the most likely locations for antlers, including in draws, canyons, along pine stringers, and in the pinyon/juniper woodlands. Because of the time of year the activity usually occurs - when the ground is usually wet and unstable - resource damage due to the use of ATV’s during these periods has increased over the years along with this activity. Damage includes rutting and erosion of soils, and vegetation trampling and destroying. Another issue raised recently is that the removal of elk and deer antlers from this and other areas has been so thorough

in recent years that few if any antlers remain for general wildlife use, e.g. as a calcium source for rodents and other species.

Fuel Wood Gathering

Fuel wood (or "firewood") cutting and gathering is popular in several parts of the area, particularly where there is relatively easy road access. The most common species of firewood sought in the area have been juniper and pinyon, with wood removal rates fluctuating over time, dependent on public needs and firewood use trends. For example, during the 1970's, as the region's population grew and weathered the energy crisis of that time, many people heated their homes with firewood, and cutting increased correspondingly in the analysis area. In recent years, though, with fewer people per capita heating with wood, the area has received less cutting pressure. Illegal fuel wood activities, though, have been a problem in several parts of the area over the years, and these activities have continued to some degree, even after overall rates of firewood use per capita for heating have declined.

Damage to roads and other resources due to firewood cutting during periods when roads and soils are wet has been a problem in the past, too.

It is unknown at this time what effect current drought and bug infestations in the area will have on firewood cutting, e.g. potential vegetation type-conversion of tree species in the area to grass or other tree species, possibly making the area less desirable for fuel wood cutting.

Past management activities, e.g. pinyon/juniper treatment resource improvement projects have provided opportunities for both private and commercial fuel wood activities.

Inventoried Roadless Areas

The Roadless Area Review processes, "RARE I" and "RARE II" of the late 1970's and early 1980's, had federal land management agencies inventory roadless areas of all federal public lands for potential addition to the national Wilderness system. Several areas on Anderson Mesa met the criteria for this system, and were included in the inventory, but were not subsequently included in the congressional Arizona Wilderness Act of 1984 (PL 98-406, 8/28/1984). This legislation identified roadless areas identified in RARE II that were not designated as wilderness to be "managed for multiple-use in accordance with land management plans…" and "that such areas need not be managed for the purpose of protecting their suitability for wilderness designation prior to or during revision of the initial land management plans." The typical areas in this category on the Coconino National Forest are canyon areas that are rugged and not traversed by existing roadways. These areas have generally remained roadless.

The Forest Service Roadless Area Conservation Final EIS (November 2000) built upon previous roadless evaluations and gave the agency direction for managing roadless areas, which are now referred to as Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs). These IRAs were based on the most recent analysis, which for the Coconino was the preparation and

analysis for the 1984 Arizona Wilderness Act.[1] In brief, the preferred alternative from the study that resulted in the Roadless Area Conservation, Final Rule (36 CFR 294, 1/12/2001) prohibits road construction, reconstruction, and timber harvest, except for stewardship purposes aimed at addressing human health and safety issues in case of imminent threat of flood, fire, or other catastrophic event that, without intervention, would cause the loss of life or property. Stewardship purpose timber harvest can only be used where it maintains or improves roadless characteristics.[2]

The three areas on Anderson Mesa that are IRAs are Padre Canyon (9,424 acres) in the northern part of the mesa area, and Jack's Canyon (2,866 acres) and Lower Jack's Canyon (776 acres) in the southern part of the analysis area. Occasional vehicular intrusions into the areas have occurred over the years, and a few track roads enter them in some places. Limited resources have precluded effective monitoring of the areas on a regular basis, and it is not known to what extent these vehicular intrusions have impacted the areas.

With significant areas of Semi-Primitive Motorized (SPM) and Semi-Primitive Non-Motorized (SPNM) (see ROS section for further definition) forest lands around them, these areas have become important to the recreating public as valuable backcountry areas of opportunity "to get away from it all", for people seeking solitude, and not necessarily the type of recreation experience (e.g. with crowding) that may be found in nearby designated Wilderness areas or other more popular primitive areas of the forest.

FLMP Inconsistencies

The aforementioned trends of increasing recreational use of Anderson Mesa lands that were once of little recreational value is inconsistent with the FLMP, since little value was placed on grassland, pinyon-juniper woodland and canyons, and marginal ponderosa pine stringers at the time the forest plan was developed. This has all changed, as today people use the mesa area for all types of recreational purposes, as described above. Increasingly, these lands are valuable for both traditional and newer methods of recreating, and for both front and backcountry uses.

Foremost in observation of increases in use by types of uses for the broad mesa area are hunting, hiking, camping, climbing, and seeking solitude in backcountry areas. Increases are also noted for the mesa mountain biking, developed camping and fishing use, but due to the generally rough terrain of the mesa, unimproved roads, and limited suitable waters and areas for developed recreation, these latter observed increases in use are limited to specific areas across the mesa.

The current FLMP uses the out-of-date Visual Monitoring System (VMS) for analysis and direction for Anderson Mesa, which has been replaced by the Scenery Management System (SMS), a similar but more up-to-date system. Additionally, the VMS direction in the FLMP classified much of the mesa area as being of little

[1] The Rare II boundaries were further evaluated and adjusted for locatability/identifiability on the ground and the presence of nonconforming structures.
[2] However, we are currently under a court injunction to not implement this direction.

importance to the average viewer, and so lower-standard visual quality objectives were established for the area, e.g. much of the mesa was inventoried as “Modification”, allowing for management activities dominating the scenery. Some exceptions were for higher visual quality standards around developed recreation areas and for areas of the mesa that were seen as backdrop from surrounding forest areas. Today, with more people using and caring about areas such as Anderson Mesa, an updated FLMP would probably include language and direction suitable for maintaining grasslands, pinyon-juniper woodlands, and other areas of the mesa with higher standards for visual conditions, e.g. where management activities would remain visually subordinate to the characteristic landscape.

The FLMP calls for management of off-road driving in order to protect resources, but in general this has not been done for the Anderson Mesa area, primarily due to the limited resources available for planning and management for the area. As a result, vehicular use on the mesa, as described previously, has adversely impacted soil, water, vegetation, wildlife, recreation and other resources through loss of vegetation, unsightly multiple braided roads, increased soil erosion, etc. The heaviest of these impacts may be found in and around the highest use areas of the mesa, including at lakes and in canyons and draws.

The FLMP requires review the ROS inventory as a part of project planning, making necessary corrections and refinements, use of the ROS inventory to analyze impacts to ROS classes due to management activities such as timber sales, range projects, and firewood sales, and for use in developing decisions on road standards and density. With few and sporadic resource projects having been done on the mesa over the years, little work has been done to update the ROS system, especially as related to the changes in uses of the area over the years, the increased importance of the area for all resources, including recreation and wildlife, and the need to provide updated ROS inventories. For example, an ROS re-inventory and classification effort for the area might cause a reduction in road density for parts of Anderson Mesa, and change to more-primitive classes for some acres of the mesa in order to optimize management opportunities for backcountry experiences, e.g. SPNM lands around IRA’s.