

SUMMARY OF SECOND PUBLIC MEETINGS

At the first round of public meetings people were asked what they believed most needed changing in the management of the Tonto National Forest. The notes taken from the discussions about that question resulted in a list of 22 main topics of concern that the meeting attendees said needed to be changed.

At the second round of public meetings, people were asked how they would prioritize all the various problem areas that were identified at the first round of meetings. The answers to that were quite varied. Most responses fell into four categories for prioritizing: Forest Health and Ecosystem Function, Economics, Stated Goals and Objectives, and Social Concerns and Issues. The type of comments on each of these is described in the following paragraphs.

Forest health and ecosystem function



Several people emphasized that ensuring the health of the ecosystem was of primary importance because it is the foundation for all other uses, and that the Forest Service should protect that principal first before allowing the privilege of various uses. Some said the focus should be on restoring the health of areas where there has been the most damage to the land and resources. Others said it was important to first protect the pristine or least damaged areas to ensure that they didn't become degraded, and then focus on the problem areas. A few said to focus first on controlling the uses that were causing problems, and then aim to restore the health of the ecosystem.



Economics

Some people suggested that economics should drive the agency's priorities, focusing the agency's efforts particularly on activities that would generate economic opportunities in support of local communities. Some said to allow market forces to protect and restore forest health. Some also said that the Tonto should focus first on what it can afford to do. One pointed out that the agency shouldn't start a project it can't finish because incomplete projects are no better than projects never started except that a lot of time and money has been wasted. One person said the Tonto should prioritize by what is costing it the most money, which is fire.



Stated Goals and Objectives



Some people said that the Tonto should set priorities by living up to the Forest Service mission of caring for the land and serving the people as well as dealing with the chief's four threats. Others suggested designing a formal ranking system that would prioritize values such as sustainability, with layers of requirements, while taking into account costs. A few said to set major goals and objectives for each activity individually. Another suggested that there should be three objectives, ranked in order, of protecting public safety, protecting resources, and then restoring degraded areas. One said that the Tonto should tackle first those projects that achieved the greatest desired conditions for each resource. One person said that sound science should drive priorities, and another said the Forest Service should rely on common sense. One person pointed out that any one approach might not suit all areas and that local districts should have more autonomy to decide priorities. A few also said that the Forest Service should look at historical trends and not repeat errors but replicate good decisions. It was also suggested that the agency be proactive rather than reactive, anticipate changes and trends, and develop various scenarios so as to be adaptable. One person said it was important to define carrying capacity area by area and for each use to ensure it was not exceeded. Another suggested that the Tonto should focus its efforts on ensuring sustainability. One suggested that animal habitat should have priority over human recreational or economic uses because animals have no options.

Social Concerns and Issues



Some said that the Tonto's first priority should be human health and safety. One suggested that the Forest Service consider social needs and values first, based on local and broader constituency uses and interests. One person said that those who spoke up the most should get the most attention. Another stated that the Forest Service should quit gearing its work towards avoiding lawsuits. Nearly every group agreed that public education was critical, especially aimed at the young, to help create respect for public lands and understanding of the impacts of certain actions or activities.

