

## Discussion of Concerns Identified in Round One of Tonto National Forest Plan Revision Public Meetings



### Public Meeting Locations and Dates

**Payson** –  
February 26, 2007

**Pleasant Valley** –  
February 27, 2007.

**Globe** –  
March 2, 2007

**Mesa** –  
March 5, 2007

**Tonto Basin** –  
March 7, 2007

**Cave Creek/North Phoenix** –  
March 13, 2007

# Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Section 1 ~ Forest Service Capacity .....	2
1.1 Agency Processes .....	2
1.2 Influences on Decisionmaking .....	2
1.3 Agency Funding .....	3
1.4 Agency Staffing .....	4
1.5 Coordination with Other Agencies .....	5
1.6 Use of Volunteers.....	6
1.7 Public Education and Information Sharing .....	7
1.8 Law Enforcement .....	8
Section 2 ~ Recreation and Access .....	9
2.1 Forest Transportation System Design and Management .....	9
2.2 Motorized Recreation Management .....	11
2.3 Developed Recreational Facilities .....	12
2.4 Hunting and Recreational Shooting .....	13
2.5 Backcountry Landing Strips.....	13
2.6 User Fees .....	14
Section 3 ~ Forest Resources .....	16
3.1 Forest Management Philosophy .....	16
3.2 Forest Health and Ecosystem Function .....	17
3.3 Fire and Fuels .....	17
3.4 Land Sales and Exchanges .....	20
3.5 Special Designations .....	21
3.6 Social, Cultural, and Historical Resources .....	22
Section 4 ~ Economic Resources .....	23
4.1 General Commercial Uses .....	23
4.2 Timber Harvest .....	23
4.3 Livestock Grazing .....	24
4.4 Mining.....	25
4.5 Commercial Recreation/Tourism .....	26

## Introduction

This paper contains a summary of the concerns identified during public meetings held on each of the six districts of the Tonto National Forest (TNF) for forest plan revision. These meetings were held in late February and early March of 2007. At the meetings, attendees were asked what they thought needed to change about the Tonto National Forest. The answers were intended to help forest planners develop a list of what needed to change in the forest management plan. Many of the concerns people brought up, however, related to issues that are generally not elements of a forest plan. Some of the concerns related to national level laws and policies, some related to agency funding or personnel, and some related to site specific projects or to areas or routes for motorized recreation. Because many of the same concerns were brought up at nearly every meeting, it seemed important to clarify which elements might be addressed in forest planning, and how or where the other concerns might be addressed.

The concerns brought up at each district were combined together and then sorted into topic areas. The topic areas were derived from the language in the comments, though many topics overlap and some comments were related to more than one topic. Individual comments from each meeting can be viewed on the plan revision web page under “public meetings.”

This is not a comprehensive list of every concern mentioned. Some items that were very specific to a particular area were generally answered at the time of the meeting. Most concerns are listed, however, at least in a generic way. If someone has a concern that is not sufficiently addressed in this document, please contact either their local district office or the planning team and we will try to locate the information.

The paper is broken into four main sections:

- 1) Forest Service Capacity
- 2) Recreation and Access
- 3) Forest Resources
- 4) Economic Uses.

Each of these sections is divided into three subsections:

- Topics of Concern, which lists the main concerns heard from the public about that topic;
- Discussion, which provides additional information about the concerns; and
- Opportunities, which explains public involvement opportunities, as well as how the topic fits into forest plan revision.

## Section 1 ~ Forest Service Capacity

### 1.1 Agency Processes

#### Topic Concerns

- Who should or should not have the authority to make decisions and at what level
- Bureaucratic logjams, over analysis, the need to streamline processes
- Agency size, accessibility, responsiveness

#### Discussion

The policies which govern Forest Service decisionmaking authority and processes include Executive Orders, various laws passed by Congress, the Code of Federal Regulations, and the Forest Service Manual and Handbook. These are beyond control of the any individual national forest. The only way to change laws that govern the Forest Service is through Congress. Executive Orders can only be changed by the President.

The Forest Service has been working steadily to improve and streamline processes and reduce obstacles to effective management, though is often caught in a policy tug-of-war over different ideas of how to accomplish those goals. Several positive steps have been made to streamline processes, however, and many critical projects have been implemented. Some processes which may seem excessive are legal requirements.

The Forest Service is also reducing its size, particularly in the Washington Office and in regional offices. This is intended to help provide more funding at the local level for projects. It will also shift more of the decision making burden to local managers, which will allow the agency to be more adaptable and responsive.

#### Opportunities

Members of the public may influence laws and policies through their elected representatives.

For information on who has the decision authority for any particular Forest Service project, contact your local ranger district.

When people participate in the development of agency plans and projects, they gain a better understanding of why things are done a certain way and are generally more supportive of the decisions. They also bring more knowledge and experience into the analysis, which can lead to better decisions.

### 1.2 Influences on Decisionmaking

#### Topic Concerns

- Undue influence from certain interest groups, other agencies, or organizations
- The American public should have more influence on agency decisions than it does
- Local citizens should have more influence on decisions than those who live elsewhere and may be less affected
- The public provides many good ideas but with little hope of implementation

**Discussion**

The Forest Service encourages input from all individuals and organizations, and welcomes ideas and suggestions. The Forest Service tries to find the best balance of uses among many competing interests without damaging the long term health and productivity of the land. When this means restricting certain uses it can give the appearance of giving preferential treatment to an opposing interest. However, most Forest Service activities are based on or constrained by legal requirements, and they rely on specialists' analysis of scientific data.

Local people are often more knowledgeable about a particular area, and are also more likely to be directly affected by management decisions. Yet public lands belong to all citizens and all have a stake in the health and management of national forests and grasslands. The Forest Service recognizes the importance of considering all stakeholder concerns and issues to ensure that the forest is managed to provide the best balance of uses and protections.

The Forest Service attempts to gather insights into public values and preferences. While the public provides many good ideas, some are not within the agency's legal or financial abilities, will not adequately solve the problem it is meant to address, or may have unintended consequences. As the planning team progresses toward plan revision, they will try to explain the reasons for a decision and why a particular suggestion might be rejected.

**Opportunities**

The best opportunity for the public, including interest groups and organizations, to influence forest management decisions is in working with the agency identify the goals and objectives for plans and activities. The public can help determine how the forest should look and the purposes it should serve for the people—within the mandates of the laws that govern Forest Service operations and within agency capacity.

There will be several opportunities for the public to become involved as the plan revision process continues. It is important for the public to work with the agency so everyone gains a better understanding of each other's perspectives and ideas, and learns more about immediate and long term effects of various uses in different areas. Some conflicts will probably always remain. The best thing to do is to work together to discover opportunities for improvement.

**1.3 Agency Funding****Topic Concerns**

- How much funding or how little the agency receives
- How funding is spent
- Getting funding to accomplish needed projects, seek alternate sources (grants)
- More funding for local needs, more funds to reach the district
- Funding abuses and waste, especially during fires
- Anyone proposing an activity on national forest lands should be responsible to pay for the research, personnel, and documentation

**Discussion**

Congress determines how much funding the Forest Service receives through appropriations to the Department of the Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies. Congress also stipulates how some of the funding is to be spent by including requirements for certain programs or activities to occur. Although the Forest Service's budget for fiscal year 2008 is expected to be less than previous years, costs for programs necessary to support agency priorities are expected to be offset by process improvements and cost reductions from a restructuring of national and regional Forest Service headquarters.

There are several oversight and accountability mechanisms now in place for spending at each level. Spending during emergency situations, such as during a wildfire, is closely monitored and there are reviews of expenditures and cost containment procedures after each fire. The increasing number and severity of fires, along with shrinking Forest Service budgets, makes cost containment a priority.

Most projects that are proposed on National Forest System lands by private interests require that the proposing party pay for necessary analysis and documentation, whether by doing it themselves, hiring a contractor, or by providing payment to the agency for staff analysis and review. Generally the only activities where the Forest Service pays for the environmental evaluations and documentation is when it is an agency-proposed action, which must be consistent with the forest plan. Occasionally a project is mandated by Congress, and Congress will then often define responsibilities. The Forest Service strives to ensure that its share of taxpayers' dollars is not spent on activities or proposals that benefit only a few individuals but rather those that benefit the public as a whole.

**Opportunities**

People can contact their elected representatives, particularly members of the Appropriations Committee, to share their thoughts on how funding should be apportioned. Monetary constraints are one of the many factors we must consider when designing our plans and projects. As we work with the public to identify what needs to be done for plan revision and when, we must ensure that goals, monitoring, and any proposed activities are within the capacity of the Forest Service to accomplish.

## **1.4 Agency Staffing**

**Topic Concerns**

- Preference for working with local FS employees, not distant ones
- Mistrust of the Forest Supervisor's Office, Washington Office, and/or the Administration
- Need for more employees at the district office or in the field
- Ensure people are better trained for their jobs
- Employees should know how to complete necessary environmental documents and permits more quickly and efficiently
- Some employees are difficult to work with or have a bad attitude

**Discussion**

The Forest Service is currently working to decentralize most decision making and has made great strides toward increasing the decision authority for forest supervisors and

district rangers. Forest Service managers realize that the local staff generally has a better idea of the unique needs and problems in their areas. The Forest Service is also centralizing a lot of administrative tasks to improve efficiency and reduce costs. It is difficult to get the correct blend of local autonomy with large scale consistency and efficiency. And as with any large bureaucracy, change often comes slowly.

With any organization, hiring the right people for the right positions and ensuring that they get the necessary training is a challenge. People move, change positions, and have personal issues arise. There will always be some employees who are better at their jobs than others, whether because of their personalities, education, or experience. It would be great if every Forest Service position could be filled with only people who were exceptionally knowledgeable, friendly, professional, skilled, and helpful; and then make sure they stayed in the position. The Forest Service will continue to try to ensure each employee's qualities and qualifications are the right match for the job, and that they get the training they need.

**Opportunities**

If you frequently have problems or issues with the same employee, and can't seem to reach an understanding or agreement, speak to that person's supervisor. If you encounter an employee who provides incorrect information, let them know so they can learn the correct answer for the next person. New employees might have misunderstood what they heard or learned about the job and may not be intentionally providing misinformation.

### ***1.5 Coordination with Other Agencies***

**Topic Concerns**

- Better coordinate with other agencies, tribes, elected officials: Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Arizona State Lands, county and city governments, and law enforcement agencies.
- Less duplication of efforts, differences or conflicts in language, policies, and management of adjacent lands
- Coordination with the State and municipalities on law enforcement, and coordination with municipalities for trash bins and collection

**Discussion**

Among the many requirements with which the Forest Service must comply are requirements for coordination and consultation with other government agencies and officials as appropriate for the project or plan. In addition to required consultation and coordination, the Forest Service always tries to improve coordination and consultation efforts, and we are constantly seeking more effective and efficient ways to do so. Recognize, however, that it is often difficult to identify and coordinate with every interest on every project, especially with the constraints of time and money. Consultation and coordination with other government officials and agencies will remain an integral part of Forest Service activities, including plan revision.

**Opportunities** – The Forest Service's outreach for plan revision includes tribes, other Federal, State, and local governments, and the general public.

## **1.6 Use of Volunteers**

### **Topic Concerns**

- Make greater use of volunteers, it improves relations and helps with funding shortfalls
- Use volunteers for road and trail construction and maintenance, user education, enforcement, litter clean up, weed removal
- Use partnerships for grant money to fund activities

### **Discussion**

Most volunteer efforts are handled at the forest or district where the work is to be done, and most districts have volunteer groups that they work with regularly. Some forest wide volunteer efforts include weed removal projects, clean up efforts, and trail maintenance. Recently a joint effort with Arizona State Parks was developed to establish a motorized peer patrol called OHV Ambassadors. This group will help educate motorized recreationists and inform them about routes and restrictions in the Arizona national forests and parks.

National forests also develop partnership agreements with various organizations, and many programs have obtained grant money to fund activities. It is usually a program manager who seeks out and applies for grants. There are several requirements for different types of grants, agreements, and partnerships. For an agreement, the project must be mutually beneficial. Generally agreements are with other agencies, though some are with private sector organizations. Partnerships can also obtain grant funding, someone needs to seek out the appropriate source and apply. The application process can be complicated and there is no guarantee that a particular applicant will get it.

### **Opportunities**

The easiest way for the public to become involved in volunteer efforts with the Forest Service is to work with an organized group for your area of interest that would like to volunteer. Some examples include:

- hiking clubs can help clear trails
- church groups can host a volunteer clean-up day
- business groups can provide materials to build a fence
- book groups can interpret an archeological site
- non-profit groups can provide funding to restore wildlife habitat
- trail-riding groups can maintain trails or pack in materials
- four-wheel drive groups can develop and distribute safety information
- college classes can monitor water quality

The national organization, Friends of the Forest, also offers a variety of opportunities for volunteers ([www.becomeafriend.org](http://www.becomeafriend.org)). If you don't want to work with a group, you can volunteer as an individual, for example, to provide information and answer questions at a trailhead, survey forest visitors, answer phones, develop a Web site, or become a campground host. Contact your nearest ranger district and someone there will try to find a volunteer activity that meets your abilities and preferences. For some volunteer efforts, the Forest Service may provide training and/or supplies.

## **1.7 Public Education and Information Sharing**

### **Topic Concerns**

- More public information and education, better outreach
- More information on the website
- More environmental and user education programs
- More people in the field talking with forest users to keep them informed
- More public meetings
- Current and accurate information on forest programs and resources: number of acres of wilderness and roadless areas, number and size of grazing allotments, timber harvest quantities, number of acres thinned or burned for fuels reduction, and acres and location of areas scheduled for fuels reduction

### **Discussion**

The Forest Service frequently offers environmental education programs, and Forest Service personnel go to schools and attend group meetings to provide information about litter control and fire prevention. Each national forest also tries to keep its web page updated with current news and events, and if you check out the different links you may discover that there is more there than you imagined. The Forest Service uses a variety of methods to get information out to the public, and welcomes suggestions. Funding for additional field personnel is not always available, and managers try to target the higher use areas with personnel to provide information.

The Forest Service will continue to provide a variety of opportunities for people to be involved with plans and projects. Sometimes meetings are the best way, but meetings must be planned, locations identified and reserved, equipment and supplies purchased or gathered, advertising sent out, and staff asked to work evening or weekend hours. There is a lot of cost and effort that goes into holding meetings, and they are not practical for every type of project. The Forest Service will continue to place notices in newspaper and on the website regarding proposals and activities, and public comment is welcome. Supervisor's offices and ranger district offices are also open during business hours for the public to come in and ask questions or share ideas.

Some specific information such as miles of roads and routes, locations of different resources, acres of roadless areas or other special designations, acres treated in fuel projects, acres burned over the past ten years, etcetera, may be available. Some of this very specific information is still being gathered, updated, or verified for plan revision.

During the first plan revision meetings it is generally too early in the process to get into such specific details. It is necessary first to determine what are the most pressing problems and issues. To begin to address how to change things it is necessary to know what all needs to change and whether it is something that can be changed through the forest plan. Once the needs for change are determined, then the specifics will become the focus; what the current condition is, what the desired condition is, how to change it, how much to change it, how to monitor, and what the measures of success will be.

### **Opportunities**

Any group or school class that would like to have a Forest Service representative visit with them and provide information on environmental issues, wildfire prevention and

safety, or any other Forest Service topic should contact their nearest Forest Service office and someone will try to schedule it.

Detailed and specific information for forest planning will become available and updated periodically on the web pages and through periodic mailings or notices. If there is some specific piece of information you would like now, please contact your nearest district office or the Supervisor's office and they will provide it if they can.

## **1.8 Law Enforcement**

### **Topic Concerns**

- More law enforcement: more law enforcement officers, better enforcement of existing laws, more concentration of law enforcement personnel in specific areas
- Stronger laws and stricter fines, increase fine for littering
- Criminal activities, off-route motorized travel, dumping and littering, poaching, drug and alcohol abuse
- Phone number or hotline to call when an illegal activity observed, weekend staffing
- Law enforcement as alternative to closing roads or areas to uses

### **Discussion**

It might be nice to have more law enforcement officers out in the forest, but that requires funding, training, space, and equipment. Forest Service law enforcement is funded as a separate line item by Congress from the funding for other Forest Service operations. Forest Service law enforcement works closely with other law enforcement organizations, including sheriff's offices, city police, State public safety departments, and federal agencies, to share resources and ensure coverage.

The legal policies that law enforcement officers operate under are determined at the Washington Office. Fine amounts are set by the courts and are designed to be consistent among law enforcement agencies.

Most national forests do not have the funding or personnel to operate a dedicated hotline, but witnesses to crimes on the national forest can call the Supervisor's Office or District Offices, and can also report to the local sheriff's office. There is a hotline sponsored by the Arizona Department of Fish and Game for people to call if they witness vandalism; 1-800-vandals (1-800-826-3257). There is also a littering hotline sponsored by Arizona Clean and Beautiful; 602-712-4683 for the Phoenix area, and 1-877-3- litter (1-877-354-8837) for the rest of Arizona. These and other programs seek to deal with the many problems of illegal activities on the national forests and elsewhere.

### **Opportunities**

If you are a witness to an illegal act and can safely get some identifying information, take notes and inform law enforcement at your local Forest Service or Sheriff's office. They will follow up if they think it would be reasonably successful to do so. To report an emergency call 911.

When you are out in the forest, set a good example for others by not riding off legal routes, by picking up your trash or shell casings, and even picking up trash that others have left. Being personally responsible and courteous is sometimes the best way to influence others' bad behavior.

## Section 2 ~ Recreation and Access

### 2.1 Forest Transportation System Design and Management

#### Topic Concerns

- More recreational roads and trails; more motorized routes
- No roads should be closed to motorized use, closed roads should be reopened
- Specific roads should be opened, improved, signed
- Road density should be decreased so that existing roads can be maintained
- Provide different levels of road or trail maintenance for different uses and skill levels
- Have additional non-motorized trails for hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding
- Pave specific roads through the forest
- Provide access across public land to inholdings, and through private land to access the national forest.
- Need more signs to tell what mode of transportation a route is designated for and what level of difficulty
- Better maps to show various routes and note difficulty level and allowed uses
- Roads or trails should be closed (See Motorized Recreation Management)

#### Discussion

The Forest Service published a new regulation in November 2005 governing the designation of routes for motorized vehicle use on national forests and grasslands. The new rule requires each national forest and grassland to identify all its routes and then designate those roads, trails, and areas that will be open to motorized vehicle use. All areas and routes not designated for motorized use will then be closed to such use. The map of routes on each forest or grassland will be the official source of information on which routes are available and for what uses.

In order to comply with this new rule, each national forest has to first identify and accurately map all its roads and trails, including non-system and user-created routes, and then determine which ones should be available for what uses. Routes are evaluated for several qualities and factors. The goals are to find the best combination of recreational opportunities for all users and to prevent resource damage. This process is expected to be completed by 2009 for the Tonto National Forest. At that time there will be accurate maps available that show the various routes, including symbols to identify the type of road or trail. It will be the public's responsibility to use the maps to identify where they can go. Currently any licensed OHV driven by a licensed driver can travel on any Forest Service motorized route. Unlicensed vehicles and unlicensed drivers can go only on levels one or two routes.

There are many reasons that the Forest Service might close a road: the road might have been designed as a temporary road with no funding for maintenance, it might pass through the habitat of a species that is negatively impacted by human presence, it may be a route that closely parallels another route to the same place and so is redundant, it may be a route that is subject to erosion and is polluting a nearby waterway, it may be the route is poorly designed or in an area that is hazardous to public safety, or one of several

other reasons. The Forest Service tries to plan its transportation system to maximize user enjoyment while protecting resources.

The Forest Service builds and maintains roads for only two reasons – public recreation and commercial uses. For commercial use roads the Forest Service generally has an agreement with the proponent for commensurate use, that is, the Forest Service will help build the road if it can be used by the general public for recreation as well. The commercial user generally pays for maintenance of the road, though if the Forest Service desires a higher maintenance level for recreational uses, it will pay the difference.

The Forest Service does not create or maintain roads for private property owners or any private interests, only for recreational use by the general public. It also does not maintain roads at a higher standard than what meets Forest Service needs and the needs of the general public. Generally, paved roads through a national forest are maintained by the county or State, sometimes with federal funding from the Federal Highway Administration.

The Forest Service evaluates any proposal for road improvements. Anytime the Forest Service improves a road up to level three or higher, it becomes subject to the Federal Highway Safety Act standards, which means the Forest Service becomes responsible for motorists' expectations for adequate safety features such as warning signs, visibility, width, lack of obstructions, safety barriers and the like. Before the Forest Service determines there is a need to improve a road to such a standard, it must meet the threshold of having an average use of 400 vehicles a day.

The Forest Service supports efforts by counties or the State to acquire and maintain routes within the forest, but most counties and the State also have limited funds, and they must decide which projects to undertake. Currently, plans and funding for paving FR 12 rest with the Federal Highway Administration. The Forest Service would neither fund nor perform the work. If Gila County wanted to take responsibility for this or any other road, the Forest Service would support that effort. The County does not have the funds to pave the road, and the Federal Highway Administration has certain stipulations attached to providing assistance that the County may not be able to or want to try to meet.

### **Opportunities**

For further information on your district's status regarding travel management, as well as issues regarding specific routes, or to be involved with the travel management planning, contact your Forest Service district office. For most other road and route issues, you may have to contact the Federal Highways Administration or Arizona Department of Transportation.

The forest plan revision process may identify areas where motorized recreation is generally appropriate, and will reference the forest's Travel Management Plan as the authority on which routes are available for which uses. The Travel Management Plan and any subsequent changes will be done in consultation with recreation and resource specialists as well as the public.

## **2.2 Motorized Recreation Management**

### **Topic Concerns**

- OHV impacts on forest resources: wildlife, soils, and water quality, user conflicts
- Motorized routes should be more limited: road closures or seasonal closures (See section on Travel Management)
- Illegal use and abuse by off-road vehicles (see section on law enforcement)
- Requiring licensing or tags to include educating users on proper behavior with fees to be used for road and trail maintenance and/or enforcement
- Having OHV manufacturers educate users about legal and responsible use

### **Discussion**

The Forest Service struggles to meet the ever increasing demand for all types of recreation, and particularly the use of OHVs, as the population increases. How to balance these demands with other, sometimes conflicting social and ecological needs and expectations is one of the greatest challenges the Tonto National Forest faces. The Tonto's travel management plans, which are to be completed by 2009, will alleviate some of the problems associated with motorized recreation. These plans will identify a system of motorized routes and restrict motorized access to those routes. As time goes on, the travel maps and plans can be revised as necessary with public input and review by specialists.

Several states currently have some type of sticker or permit system for OHVs, and most of the money from these programs goes to the agencies that manage the areas or routes, whether county, State, or Federal. Generally these programs are well received by both motorized users and non-motorized users because it helps provide and maintain a variety of routes while minimizing negative impacts. Arizona currently does not have such a program, though one has been proposed in the State legislature. Sometimes such legislative proposals include requirements for spark arresters, decibel levels, and helmets for underage users.

Any requirement for manufacturers to educate users would have to come from the legislature, not an administrative agency.

**Opportunities** – This is an area where public input and participation is critical because there are no easy solutions as population and demand will continue to increase. Decisions about specific routes and maintenance levels will be made in each district's Travel Management Plan. The revised forest plan may identify areas where motorized recreation is generally appropriate, consistent with the Travel Management Plan.

Identifying recreational opportunities might be part of forest plan revision, though any particular development or proposal would be evaluated and decided at the project level. While we know we can't please everyone, by working together and sharing knowledge and ideas, we can try to develop a plan that will promote adequate recreational opportunities while minimizing user conflicts and protecting those resources upon which we and future generations depend.

## 2.3 Developed Recreational Facilities

### **Topic Concerns**

- More campgrounds, restrooms, and picnic areas in specific locations
- Remove certain developed facilities
- Some developed recreation sites were not well planned or designed for public use and enjoyment
- Lack of adequate maintenance at some sites: water supplies, toilet cleaning, trash removal
- Open group only campgrounds to individuals and families to lessen crowding in non-group only campgrounds
- Why do horse campers not pay the same as others?

### **Discussion**

The TNF is among the top five national forests for visitor use. In 2002, the Tonto received nearly 6 million visits, and those numbers have been steadily increasing. Some areas get extremely high use during certain days or times of the year. The Forest Service can barely keep up with the demand for facilities and maintenance in some places. To build additional facilities requires planning, design, environmental analysis, contracting, and of course, funding.

Some developed recreation sites and facilities were developed as an integral part of other projects. For instance, the developed recreation sites around Roosevelt Lake were designed as a part of the Bureau of Reclamation project when Roosevelt Dam was raised. Developed sites are usually designed not only to improve public enjoyment, but also to minimize negative impacts from high density use. When a great many people use an area, it can denude vegetation, compact soils, increase user conflicts, and increase trash and pollution. Near water bodies, undeveloped sites can lead to degradation of water quality from erosion and human and animal waste. Developed sites are designed to reduce negative impacts while providing the highest level of user enjoyment. Sites that get the highest amount of use generally have the most development. Most of these locations also have signs, in both English and Spanish, to inform people about the policies and requirements. Forest Service personnel are also generally more visible at these high use sites.

If there are group sites not being used, please let us know which ones and we will evaluate the potential for expanding its uses. The horse camp at Frazier campground has the same requirements and fees as other camps.

### **Opportunities**

The Forest Service will continue to provide a variety of recreational opportunities, with both developed and undeveloped sites. Check with your district office or the visit the forest's website to find out what projects or proposals for recreation are planned. A range of recreational opportunities and suitable areas for recreation will be evaluated as we work with the public on forest plan revision. Projects for specific recreational opportunities or sites will not be evaluated in the plan revision but will be handled on a case-by-case basis.

## 2.4 Hunting and Recreational Shooting

<b>Topic Concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Hunting and target shooting concerns: public safety, noise, and litter</li><li>- Identify a few areas that are safe and acceptable for target shooting, ban shooting from the rest of the forest</li><li>- Coordinate with the State Department of Fish and Game to produce a map and dates for hunting areas</li></ul>
<b>Discussion</b> <p>Target shooting is currently restricted on about 80,000 acres of the TNF near urban areas around Mesa and Cave Creek. There are two developed target shooting sites; one near Payson and one near Globe. The TNF has no current plans for creating new developed shooting areas, nor for restricting shooting in additional areas. In spite of the fact that people out recreating on the forest may occasionally hear gun fire from target shooters, there is no record of a passerby being accidentally hit or accidental property damage. (There was one incident of a shooter accidentally injuring a companion.)</p>
<b>Opportunities</b> <p>As with nearly any activity, some people act responsibly and a few do not. The Forest Service appeals to all visitors to be careful, whether with vehicles, firearms, campfires, or anything else that has the potential to do harm. The public can help by educating others and setting a good example. Target shooters should not shoot at bottles and leave broken glass, should always pick up and carry out their targets and other litter. Shooters should also realize that empty shell casings are litter the same as any other trash and pick them up as well. If you see undesirable behavior, and feel comfortable doing so, talk to the person and explain the negative effects of their behavior on the enjoyment of other users, on wildlife, and on the environment.</p>

## 2.5 Backcountry Landing Strips

<b>Topic Concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Allow maintenance and recreational use of backcountry landing strips</li><li>- Would also make them useable for medical evacuations, fire fighting planes, and for emergency landings</li></ul>
<b>Discussion</b> <p>The Forest Service does not have an official policy on the use of backcountry airstrips, and decisions about their use are the responsibility each District Ranger for the district where the airstrip is located. There are several concerns the Forest Service has about the use of backcountry airstrips, however. One is that some of these sites have not been well designed and continued use could result in resource damage. In order to improve them for use, there would have to be an environmental evaluation. There are also public safety concerns, wildlife issues, and the concern about cultural resources being damaged. And there is the potential that these airstrips could be used for drug smuggling or other illegal activities. At the present time, the rangers on the TNF are not prepared to allow maintenance and use of backcountry airstrips.</p>
<b>Opportunities</b> <p>Decisions on backcountry airstrips rest with the district ranger on each district. For further information or discussion about a particular backcountry air strip, contact the ranger for that district.</p>

## 2.6 User Fees

### **Topic Concerns**

- Opposition to user fees, people pay taxes and other fees already
- Concerned that fee money generated not going toward maintenance and improvement
- Fees too high for undeveloped sites
- Tonto fee system not user friendly
- Access pass system confusing and inconsistent in the language
- Do not charge a fee to those hosting OHV education workshops

### **Discussion**

User fees supplement Congressionally appropriated funds for national forest recreation opportunities. On the Tonto, user fees pay for about half of the recreation program. Eighty percent of the fees collected are used for on the ground operation and maintenance of developed recreation sites. Operation and maintenance includes trash collection and removal, restroom and table maintenance and cleaning, boat ramp and dock maintenance, the navigational aids program, and law enforcement. Fifteen percent of the fees are used to pay support services and to collect the fees. Five percent of the fees are placed in a regional account to pay for new startup and reconstruction projects.

Boat license and registration fees are split between State Parks and the Arizona Game and Fish Department. Arizona State Parks has a grant process for State Lake Improvement Funds with which the Forest Service participates. These funds are for new and reconstruction of facilities and are not available for operation and maintenance. Fishing license fees go to the Arizona Game and Fish Department and are not available for operation and maintenance of facilities.

The TNF collected recreation use fees at water-based and high-use recreation sites across the forest since 1996 under the Recreational Fee Demonstration Program (PL 104-134 as amended). The Forest Service was able to demonstrate how fees collected could be used for operation and maintenance of recreation facilities as well as reduce the deferred maintenance backlog. Congress authorized current collections under the Federal Land Recreation Enhancement Act (2005 Consolidated Appropriations Act, PL 108-447). These programs have generated an average of \$2 million per year in fee revenue that has been instrumental in maintaining the recreation facilities and services at the sites where fees are charged.

Due to the high volume of visitation, maintenance and trash collection continues to be a problem. For example, Tonto Basin District at Roosevelt Lake was emptying trash dumpsters and restrooms twice a day during holidays and was still unable to keep up with volume of use.

Since October 2, 2006, fee machines are no longer available at the sites. Instead, visitors pay fees using a pass purchased ahead of their visits at either a TNF office or at one of over 100 retail outlets. The transition period to a vendor-based system has resulted in inconvenience to some visitors until the program is completely instituted and customers are fully aware of the change. The program is being phased in as follow.

- Customer education/transition period: During the initial 6-month transition phase, efforts were to communicate and educate customers about the new system. Those who failed to display the required pass were issued a *Notice of Non-Compliance*, affording them an alternate method of paying the required fee by mail after their visit.
- After this public education/transition phase, warnings and citations will be issued to those who do not provide the passes as required.

The new system is more cost-effective and easier for customers to use. Although daily passes are no longer available for purchase at recreation sites, they can be purchased at a wide variety of retail outlets statewide and TNF offices. The advantages of the new system are:

- Passes are widely available and many outlets offer extended business hours.
- Multiple passes can be purchased at one time, thus increasing convenience for frequent forest visitors.
- The new passes are simple to use, taking the frustration out of complying with fee requirements.
- A convenient forest website online order form for ordering passes is available.
- For frequent visitors there are additional pass options, such as an annual pass, which provides a discount and alternative to daily passes.
- User fees remain the same: Day-use passes still cost \$6 per vehicle and \$4 per watercraft.
- More money is available to direct to on-the-ground improvements and meet REA fee collection cost requirements.

All vehicles parked within a site that has a Tonto annual or day-use pass requirement must display a pass. Use of roads or routes in the Forest Service transportation system does not require a pass.

OHV education workshops are not a Forest Service program. OHV education workshops may be conducted on Forest Service system routes as authorized under a Special Use Permit.

### **Opportunities**

User fees will probably remain for developed recreation areas to help maintain them and reduce resource damage. The Forest Service welcomes ideas and suggestions on how to make the process easier and more efficient.

## Section 3 ~ Forest Resources

### 3.1 Forest Management Philosophy

#### **Topic Concerns**

- Manage for multiple uses
- Manage based on the best available science
- Emphasize the protection of the natural resources
- Use a conservative approach to taking any action—e.g., instead of a proposed action having to show there would be harm before being stopped or mitigated, it should be required to prove there would be no harm before going forward
- All actions should be steps toward achieving a broad synthesis of public values
- Practice adaptive management using good monitoring techniques, review application of the program and results regularly, change as soon as something isn't working

#### **Discussion**

One of the many areas of disagreement among the American public is what the ideal role and objective for public lands should be. One of the main objectives of the public involvement process is for us to better understand the different views and values of the public, and for the public to understand the many views and values of others. We also want to share the information people need to understand the implications and trade offs of different choices.

Only Congress can change the laws that dictate overall management policies for the Forest Service. In its rules and policies, the Forest Service describes and defines how it implements the laws passed by Congress. One of the laws that dictates how the forest is managed is the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act, though many people have very different ideas of exactly what that Act requires. What it says basically is that the national forests are to be managed to provide for outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and fish and wildlife purposes without impairing the land's productivity. It does not require that all of those uses should occur in every location.

As with many issues in the public forum, there is no precise, clear answer to many of the issues about land and resource management. Some people propose that science should determine all resource management questions. Others point out that although science can provide information, it does not determine the relative value of different choices. Some people believe lands should be managed for the greatest good for the greatest number as Gifford Pinchot suggested, but what constitutes the greatest good is also often not agreed upon.

The Forest Service has learned that adaptive management is crucial. We also recognize that sometimes we have incomplete or inaccurate information, and must be willing to move ahead in spite of it. There may be gaps in our science, inaccuracies in our interpretation, or biases in our methods or the questions we ask of the science. The Forest Service's mission is "Caring for the Land and Serving the People," but there are nearly as many different ideas on what that means and how to do it as there are different people in the United States.

**Opportunities**

The process of working together and learning from each other can help all of us develop a greater appreciation for different views as well as for the complexities of resource management. It is important for people to share their ideas and suggestions for plans and projects. As we get further along in the plan revision process, suggestions for specific management approaches will be further discussed evaluated with the public.

**3.2 Forest Health and Ecosystem Function****Topic Concerns**

- Many issues: invasive species, insects and disease, watershed health, wildlife and habitat, effects of climate change, ecosystem restoration, ecological impacts from various uses, and reintroduction of native species.

**Discussion**

There are many projects planned or currently underway to improve forest health, reduce invasive species, reintroduce native species, and restore ecosystem function. Funding for all Forest Service projects is in short supply, though partnerships and grants help a great deal and volunteer efforts can be very effective. The results of some of these projects may be seen immediately, others may take many years.

Habitat has been restored for various species, including improving ponds for the Chiricahua leopard frog, and for native pupfish and top minnows—which are also great mosquito eaters. These efforts continue as new locations are identified. Invasive weeds have been reduced or eradicated in various areas through use prescribed fires and through volunteer weed pulling events. Invasive weeds have been eradicated around campgrounds and administrative sites through the use of herbicides, and specialists have been developing a final Environmental Analysis to approve using herbicides in a few other areas of the forest where appropriate. There are several invasive weed species on the TNF, both native and non-native, and prioritization for eradication is based on a screening system that considers such factors as how quickly it spreads, how widespread it already is, how great the impacts are, how effective eradication efforts are, and other factors. Some weed species will probably never be eradicated and the best we can do is try to minimize negative impacts.

In its mission to care for the land and serve the people, the Forest Service tries to find the best balance of resource uses and protections.

**Opportunities**

Forest Service plans and projects are designed to bring us closer to the conditions we want to have on the forest. As we revise the forest plan, we will continue to work with the public to determine what those forest conditions should and can be and how to best achieve them. We will also continue to work with the public to design and implement specific projects.

**3.3 Fire and Fuels****Topic Concerns**

- Concentrate fire and fuels reduction efforts around homes and communities
- Forest Service should shift its priorities from suppression to prevention—do more

### thinning

- Use thinning—allowing commercial use of the cut timber also benefits the local economy
- Only “dog hair” (thick, small diameter trees) should be removed
- Remove diameter restrictions on juniper
- Private property owners can help thin national forest lands adjacent to their property
- Use livestock grazing to reduce fine fuels
- Allow residents to collect firewood without a fee
- Use inmate labor for thinning
- Allow cutting of dead standing oak
- Follow White Mountain Tribe’s forestry practices
- Use prescribed burns to reduce fuels—it’s cheaper and more closely mimics natural regime and leaves the nutrients in place to benefit the soil
  - No prescribed fires because of smoke and because sometimes the fire gets away
- Use forest products from fuels reduction to create energy, such as biomass and cellulous ethanol

### **Discussion**

Fuel treatment is an important component of the Tonto’s overall fire program. In spite of the fact that wildfire suppression is very costly, about 35 to 40 % of the Tonto’s fire budget is for fuels reduction. On average the Tonto treats about 20 to 25 thousand acres per year.

Projects over the past six years include over 6,000 acres of thinning and fuel break construction on the Payson District around Payson, Pine, Strawberry, Verde Glen, Rim Trails, and Whispering Pines. Prescribed burning will continue in the future as a means of reducing fuels and reintroducing fire to the ecosystem as a natural disturbance, which was minimized for nearly 100 years of fire suppression. A prescribed burn requires a great deal of planning and evaluation of conditions and is carried out under carefully designed procedures. In spite of all the careful planning and evaluation, some elements can be unpredictable. However, the alternatives to doing prescribed burns are so severe as to warrant the risks.

In order to create an economic incentive for a business to try to process small diameter wood products, a reliable and sustainable supply is needed. Most companies are very cautious about the financial risks due to the uncertainties of the wood supply from the national forest.

Livestock grazing can be a tool in reducing fine grassy and herbaceous fuels. Unfortunately cattle are not easily directed to where they would be most needed, such as along roadways. In some areas goats have been used effectively for maintaining fire breaks. Overall, however, livestock grazing is not as practical to use as a tool for fuels reduction as is mechanical thinning and prescribed burning.

Standing oak is not allowed to be cut because it is a mast producer. Arizona Game & Fish does not want the Forest Service to allow these to be cut, and since some oaks lose their leaves seasonally, someone could cut a live oak and not realize it. The Tonto used to

allow the cutting of dead juniper, but there became too great a loss of the large dead juniper component and a deficit in snag recruits for habitat. A decision was made to phase out cutting of dead standing trees. In the past couple years the Tonto has allowed cutting of dead standing again but has limited the size. This smaller size class is where most of the dead fuel component is.

Eliminating diameter restrictions on species such as juniper would have to be taken into account on a case by case basis, depending upon the purpose of a proposed treatment and the desired future conditions. Oak is thinned in fuels reduction projects and will continue to be. Trees of all sizes, heights, etc. provide some habitat requirements for some wildlife, so the TNF tries to accommodate these needs by providing and maintaining a wide range of tree sizes in all projects. The agency is directed to use uneven-aged management, so much of what is and will be done in forestry practice will be similar to what the White Mountain tribe does.

We have used inmate labor around the community of Pine in fuel break construction.

Biomass is the term for biological material which can be used as fuel for furnaces. Branches and small diameter trees, along with other biological material (weeds and brush), can be used to fuel furnaces to heat public buildings such as schools or offices. Gila County is exploring the possibility of having one of the public buildings in Payson converted or have wood heat assist, and is also looking into a Cogen plant in the area, but this is only in a preliminary talking phase. There is a biomass plant being built up in Snowflake scheduled to come on line this fall. This plant will be utilizing biomass from the Tonto to some extent and will provide power to the paper mill there.

Cellulose ethanol is a chemical that has been refined from plant cellulous into a fuel that can also be burned as an alternative or additive to gasoline. The review and implementation of new technologies, such as making cellulous ethanol from forest biological waste products, is outside the realm of the operation of the national forest. A private enterprise would have to propose such a project, though Forest Service research stations might evaluate this sort of opportunity and determine if it is feasible.

### **Opportunities**

Fire wood cutting and fuels removal policies are determined by the District Ranger on each district. In the Pleasant Valley and Payson Districts, where most of the Tonto's heavy fuels are located, people can cut brush, dead vegetation, and pick up debris on the ground near their homes. They can work on an area the width of their lot and approximately 100' from the boundary. All the material must be disposed of properly, it cannot be piled on the national forest. They cannot cut live trees, but they can limb them up to reduce ladder fuels. If there is a snag that is posing a threat, the Forest Service will send qualified people out to look at it. If they feel it is safe enough to drop the snag, they will do so. If they determine the snag is too dangerous to drop, such as that it might fall on the home, the homeowners have the option of leaving it or hiring a professional tree contractor to drop it at their own expense.

For fuel reduction projects on a larger scale, such as a whole subdivision, the

homeowners should meet with their local fire chief who would be in charge of the clean up. The Forest Service will assist where it can, make recommendations, and do regular checks to make sure people are adhering to guidelines.

The Tonto's personal use firewood policy is managed through two different permits. There is a free use permit for dead and down and dead standing pine (up to 12" diameter at breast height) for up to five cords on the Payson and Pleasant Valley Districts. The permit can be obtained at Globe and Tonto Basin offices also. Requiring a permit allows Forest Service personnel to advise people on areas for gathering and any restrictions. The second permit offered is a \$25.00, four-cord permit for dead and down of all species, and dead standing juniper (12" diameter at the base or smaller). This permit is available forestwide but the harvest areas are only on the Payson, Pleasant Valley, Globe, and Tonto Basin Districts. Mesa and Cave Creek districts do not allow fuelwood gathering on their districts. This decision is made by the District Rangers based on their evaluation of conditions and risks.

The revised forest plan will include goals for improving forest health, including the reduction of fuels and the restoration of forest health. The public can work with us to develop a plan that is feasible, with measurable goals, and that will be adaptable to changing knowledge and conditions.

### *3.4 Land Sales and Exchanges*

#### **Topic Concerns**

- No land sales and land exchanges, do not reduce the size of Tonto
- Relinquish control of non-essential acreage
- Plan exchanges to combine isolated tracts
- Exchange or sell lands needed for county growth and development
- No sales or exchanges without an evaluation of environmental effects
- The Forest Service and the federal government should divest itself of lands and either sell them to private interests or give them back to the Indians

#### **Discussion**

Generally land exchanges do not result in loss of acreage of public lands. Land exchanges seek to equalize value and acreage. These exchanges benefit the public by acquiring lands that are within the forest boundaries and decreasing fragmentation. The lands that are exchanged for inholdings are often on the forest's edge and are better suited to other purposes. Because Forest Service land exchanges in Arizona can be for lands in any Arizona national forest, it is possible that a land exchange could result in a decrease in land base for the Tonto and an increase in land for another Arizona national forest.

If the Forest Service initiated a land exchange it would have to undergo an environmental review and most likely require an environmental impact statement (EIS). Land exchanges that do not require an EIS include if the exchange is with an entity with similar resource management objectives and practices, or if the sale or exchange results in land uses that remain essentially the same. Land exchanges directed by Congress are beyond the control of the Forest Service and may not require an EIS. The Forest Service would initiate a land exchange only if it were determined to be in the best interest of the public and the

agency.

The Forest Service is given very limited authority to sell National Forest System lands because it generally requires a Congressional Act. Most authorities allowing the sale of federal lands identify one or a small number of specific properties for sale in a limited geographical area. These properties, which are usually administrative sites and facilities, are named in the acts, and once the properties are sold the act expires. A couple acts allow sales that meet specific criteria. There is the Small Tracts Act which allows the sale of parcels of 100 acres or less under very specific conditions, and the Education Land Grant Act which allows school districts to purchase small parcels of land for school construction or expansion.

Land management agencies like the Forest Service do not actually own the land, it is owned by the government and managed for the benefit of the public. The Forest Service is the land manager for National Forest System lands. While some people feel it is not right that the federal government should control land, or at least so much land, most people in the United States have indicated that they are glad these lands remain mostly undeveloped; protecting water supplies and habitat for wildlife, providing for timber and livestock forage, and being available for public recreation. Since these are the public's lands we try to manage them to best benefit everyone.

**Opportunities**

If the revised forest plan includes recommendations for land exchanges, it would be to help achieve desired conditions of the forest. Desired conditions for the forest, and various means to achieve them, will be developed with public input.

### *3.5 Special Designations*

**Topic Concerns**

- Recommend all or some roadless areas for wilderness
- Recommend additional segments of the Verde River as wild and scenic

**Discussion**

There are 14 inventoried roadless areas on the TNF, comprising approximately 170,000 acres, or about 6% of the forest. Most roadless area inventories occurred decades ago and some of these areas may no longer be roadless. They are called inventoried roadless areas based on the definitions used during Roadless Area Review and Evaluations (RARE) during the mid-seventies. Some of these areas may retain their roadless character and some might also have wilderness qualities, or they may not.

To recommend additional segments of the Verde River as wild and scenic would require additional study and evaluation.

**Opportunities**

Area recommendations and special designations are be an important consideration of plan revision, and we welcome input on which areas people believe are best suited for what uses. During plan revision, roadless areas may be reviewed for their wilderness characteristics and potential for recommendation. Segments of rivers may also be considered. The public will be invited to comment on areas and rivers and to help evaluate their potential.

### **3.6 Social, Cultural, and Historical Resources**

#### **Topic Concerns**

- Recreational cabins are important culturally and historically- they add value to TNF. As long as people are abiding by the lease terms, the leases should be renewed.
- Archaeological sites should be allowed to age naturally, vandalism be curtailed by limiting access.
- Protect archaeological sites.
- Do not close old mines, they are historically valuable and interesting. Close only hazardous ones.

#### **Discussion –**

Management and lease renewal decisions for recreational cabins are the responsibility of the district rangers. They have the information and do the evaluation for each situation.

Allowing sites to “age naturally” is the primary purpose of protection as it is practiced in the Forest Service. The only time that we do any more—stabilization, erosion protection, etc.—is when there is a threat of extraordinary loss as a result of unusual events, past management practices, or use impacts. Restriction of access does not protect a site from vandalism, all that it does is provide an increased level of privacy for the pothunter to do what he or she does without fear of being discovered. Many of our most severely vandalized sites are in wilderness areas miles from any road.

The Forest Service attempts to protect all archaeological sites, as well as cultural and historic artifacts and sites. There are too many sites to monitor them all.

All old mines are potentially hazardous, and several people die exploring old mines every year. Some are not geologically safe since they are manmade and the material they are bored into may be fractured or soft. Support timbers are sometimes rotten and can fall, and there may also be sudden holes that can't be seen well in the dark. Many mines have bad air or a lack of oxygen because they often have no ventilation. Several people have lost their lives in old mines because of bad air in the confined space. Rattlesnakes and other potentially dangerous animals like to inhabit old mines, and sometimes explosives have been left behind. It is one of the Forest Service's priorities to close or barricade old mines.

#### **Opportunities**

Protection of historical and cultural artifacts is important to everyone as well as for future generations. As with many other resources, we depend on the public to be responsible and to teach their children to appreciate the importance of these resources and how to avoid damaging them. It also helps to set a good example to others who might not be aware of the value or importance of these resources, or even be aware that their actions are damaging them.

Most of the requirements for the management of cultural, archaeological, and historical resources are dictated by federal laws and policies. The revised forest plan will acknowledge the importance of archaeological, cultural, and historical resources, and might recommend additional provisions for their protection. There may also be areas of geological interest that could be recognized in the forest plan revision.

## Section 4 ~ Economic Resources

### 4.1 General Commercial Uses

#### Topic Concerns

- Allow use of public lands to contribute to the economy
- Economic uses can improve Forest Service funding, support local economies, and improve forest health
- Public lands should not be developed to benefit commercial enterprises
- Some commercial enterprises not economically viable without subsidies
- Commercial development degrades the environment

#### Discussion

The Forest Service was originally established in 1905 to protect watersheds and provide a constant supply of timber for the American people. Forest Service lands and other public lands also provide for economic activities such as livestock grazing, mineral mining, oil and gas development, and commercial recreation based on laws that govern how the Forest Service operates and what uses are permitted by law. The overarching mission of the agency is to protect the land and serve the people, and this includes many commercial as well as non-commercial uses.

In addition to commercial and economic uses, the Forest Service also provides for open space, wildlife habitat, watershed protection, and non-commercial recreation. Over the past several decades, public expectations and preferences have changed, new laws have been enacted or old ones reinterpreted, and our knowledge and understanding of ecosystem function and dynamics has improved. All of these changes have led to changes in the management approach and outputs of Forest Service System lands. Looking back over the 100+ years of Forest Service history, there has always been conflict and controversy over degrees of preservation and development for public lands. This conflict is evident in writings by Theodore Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir at the time the national forests were established, and has only increased as demand for all the various resources has increased with the population.

#### Opportunities

If the public wants to change the laws that govern Forest Service policy regarding uses national forest lands, they would have to work through their elected Congressional representatives.

It is essential that the public work with the agency to develop a plan that can balance these many uses while protecting the land and its resources for future generations. As we develop a revised forest plan, finding that balance of uses, and the right places for different uses, may be the greatest challenge for the Forest Service and members of the public who are willing and able to work with us.

### 4.2 Timber Harvest

#### Topic Concerns

- Timber harvesting reduces fuels/fire hazards around homes and communities
- Commercial use of wood products benefits the local economy and returns funds to the

agency

- Provide a reliable supply of small diameter timber to encourage the development of industries that use it
- Encourage the development of biomass energy generation to use small trees, branches, and brush from thinning projects
- Too many barriers to quick harvesting of diseased or burned trees
- Commercial timber harvest is not good for the land: it damages soils and increases erosion, reduces habitat for certain species, and creates a visual eyesore.
- Logging only exists on public lands because of taxpayer subsidies
- Logging increases the risk of invasive weeds and fire

### **Discussion**

The Forest Service commercially thinned approximately 1,500 acres on the Payson and Pleasant Valley Ranger Districts, which was funded by producing timber products. We currently have over 1,000 acres of timber harvest under contract which has not been treated yet. The general purpose of these thinning projects is to improve health and reduce fire risk. The harvest improves forest health and vigor by reducing stand density to within a normal range, increasing diameter growth. Very few large trees are included in the harvest activities. Emphasis is on reduction of the denser, smaller diameter trees.

Heavy equipment use is controlled by sale administration and “best management practices” for erosion prevention/control, which have been in use for years. Wildlife disturbances from harvest machinery and related activities is very minor, as activities occur in very localized areas at any given time, and are not continuous. Slash from timber harvest is generally treated by lopping/scattering so that it is low to the ground and settles quickly with winter weather. Many recent sales have skidded entire trees to landings where the slash is piled and burned leaving little additional slash in the forest. Measures are taken to ensure weed seeds are not transferred by cleaning the equipment.

There are many research publications that support and show the need for mechanical thinning and burning to reduce fuel hazards and improve the health and functionality of our ecosystems. There are inherent risks when using prescribed burning and fire in general, but fuel moisture conditions are monitored very closely and burning is avoided during periods when control is questionable.

### **Opportunities**

The public can help us design a forestry program that can take advantage of various opportunities to use commercial harvest to improve vegetation conditions and reduce fire fuels on the forest, and to support the economies of local communities.

## **4.3 Livestock Grazing**

### **Topic Concerns**

- Livestock grazing is an important economic, cultural, and historical use of TNF
- Livestock grazing helps reduce fire risk by reducing fine fuels
- Restore livestock numbers that were reduced because of drought
- Policies enacted since 2000 have not been effective, return to pre-2000 management
- Drought continues, allow voluntary retirement of allotments

- Livestock grazing must be compatible with the long term ecological health
- Livestock grazing needs to be better balanced with the foraging needs of wildlife
- Reduce or eliminate livestock grazing on public lands
- Water tanks and guzzlers maintained by ranchers at their own expense benefit wildlife
- Ranchers maintain improvements—fences, water tanks, pipes, and pumps—even when allotment not being used; permittee must pay for damage by vandalism even if they aren't using allotment

**Discussion**

The Forest Service recognizes the value of livestock grazing for ranchers, communities, and the public. Grazing can serve as a tool to accomplish goals for vegetation conditions. Grazing allotments today are managed using an adaptive management strategy. Various ecological elements are monitored, and changes are made to the numbers, rotation, or timing of grazing animals as necessary. What elements are monitored depends on the desired condition of the allotment, and might include monitoring of vegetation type and height, water quantity and quality, wildlife numbers and species, and habitat. The primary focus of grazing management is watershed protection.

Allotment management plans take into account drought, and as drought continues, additional adjustments can be made. This approach is intended to ensure that grazing is compatible with the long term ecological health of the land. Some allotments have been voluntarily retired because they were not well-suited for grazing. Livestock can also help reduce fuels, and it is an appropriate treatment in some areas.

Grazing permits give the permittee the privilege of grazing their livestock on public lands. Part of the permit requirement is that the range improvements will be maintained. It is to the benefit of the permittee that the improvements are functional for when they restock the allotment. Vandalism of property is unfortunate whenever it occurs and the Forest Service does what it can to prevent it.

**Opportunities**

People using public lands should be conscientious about not damaging range improvements nor leaving gates open. Anyone observing vandalism should report it to law enforcement.

As we proceed with plan revision, the public can help us identify suitability of various areas for livestock.

**4.4 Mining**

**Topic Concerns**

- Mining important in history and culture of TNF
- Mining provides good jobs and helps the local economy
- Limit mining because of its environmental effects, potential toxicity to drinking water and wildlife
- Revise or eliminate the General Mining Law of 1872

**Discussion**

Mining is important to many people and communities around the TNF. Mining operations are controlled by a variety of laws, many of which are designed to minimize

and mitigate negative environmental effects. The Forest Service also has policies governing mining operations.

The majority of mining operations are regulated by laws and policies outside of the purview of the Forest Service. Any changes in those laws would be the responsibility of Congress. There have been discussions in Congress periodically about revising the General Mining Law to make it more appropriate for today's mineral needs technologies, and public expectations, but so far it has not been done.

**Opportunities**

During plan revision, planners and the public will consider areas that may have mineral development potential as a part of the evaluation of the suitability of areas for various uses.

**4.5 Commercial Recreation/Tourism**

**Topic Concerns**

- More recreational opportunities on the forest, both in quantity and diversity
- Bring in more tourism dollars to small communities
- Maintain the current level of recreation special use permits – Salt River
- A more informed approach to developed recreation: research trends and wants, plan for future growth, treat recreation management on the forest as a business

**Discussion**

When national forests were first established in the early twentieth century, timber production and watershed protection were the main focus. When the Multiple Use-Sustained Yield Act was passed in 1960, it listed outdoor recreation, range, timber, watershed, and wildlife and fish as the purposes for which the national forests should be managed. Since that time, recreation has expanded exponentially to become the most significant use on many national forests.

The Forest Service provides for a variety of commercial recreational as well as non-commercial opportunities. There is disagreement about how much and what kind of recreation the national forests should provide, some saying that recreation should not even be part of the Forest Service's responsibilities while others see it as the main or most important service. Some would like more developed recreation and others prefer only primitive and undeveloped opportunities or indicate that recreational development is inconsistent with resource protection. Some say that the Forest Service should turn over all profitable recreation to private interests, while others suggest that public lands are to benefit the public and not for private businesses to make a profit.

Tonto National Forest is among the five top national forests for recreation. The TNF permits a variety of commercial recreation special uses, including single events, outfitter/guides, commercial photography and movie making, resorts and marinas, and rental services such as inner tube rentals on the river and a livery stable. It is often difficult to determine the best balance of different types of recreation for all users as use levels and preferences change. Recreation specialists track trends and try to anticipate needs, and make adjustments as necessary.

**Opportunities**

The TNF will continue to work with different groups, permittees, and the public to identify and provide the best mix of recreational opportunities. Ideas and suggestions for other approaches are always welcome. Some types of policy changes would require changing laws, or rules in the code of Federal Regulations. Others are the responsibility of the Forest Supervisor or District Ranger.

Opportunities for various types and amounts of commercial recreation will be considered during plan revision, and we will work with special use permittees as well as the public to identify whether the amounts and types currently permitted are appropriate.