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Values, Attitudes and Beliefs Toward National Forest System Lands: The Gila National Forest

Values, Attitudes and Beliefs toward National Forest System Lands: The Gila National Forest

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Executive Summary

Within the Southwest Region, there are approximately 21 million acres of national forest land and about 9 million acres are within New Mexico. The Gila National Forest (NF) in western New Mexico administers approximately 3.3 million of these acres. The Gila NF includes the Aldo Leopold Wilderness (about 200,000 acres), the Gila Wilderness (about 560,000 acres), and portions of the Blue Range Wilderness (about 29,000 acres).

Four counties are associated with the Gila NF: Catron, Grant, Hidalgo, and Sierra. These four counties have a total of almost 12 million acres, but each is sparsely populated. The total population of the four counties is about 52,592 based on U.S. Census 2003 population estimate. The distribution of the total population of the study area is as follows: Catron County has about 3,400 persons, Grant County about 29,800 people, Hidalgo County 5,234, and Sierra County totals about 13,125 persons.

The four project area counties have socioeconomic characteristics similar to other rural agricultural counties in the west: overall population is increasing at higher than state averages; median age is increasing while the numbers of persons under 18 is decreasing; average income is lower than state averages; poverty rates are generally higher; and, agriculture shows a pattern of operations increasing in amount of acreage while decreasing in overall numbers.

Data collection was accomplished by a combination of individual interviews and small group discussions that were guided by a topic listing (included in Appendix). Approximately 51 persons participated in individual and group interviews. Additional follow-up interviews were conducted with four persons to clarify issues and develop more details about specific topics. The data collected were coded using a combination of predefined and emergent codes. The results were organized by themes that correspond to the organization of the report.

The social environment of the project area has characteristics that influence values and beliefs about the Gila NF. These characteristics include: a multi-cultural heritage; a self-defined social identity as an out of the way place; skepticism about government; economies transitioning from commodity use to tourism and amenity uses; grazing conflicts; a strong local environmental presence; a changing population mix with an increased presence of retirees and other newcomers; and, an outdoor lifestyle. These characteristics imply a mix of values and beliefs based on types of use, length of residence, and cultural background. This social environment is also characterized by polarization about forest management issues, especially grazing and timber harvesting. Additionally, there is a history of contentious forest-community relationships.

Several categories of beliefs and values about forest lands and their management were identified: shared and diverse beliefs about forest characteristics; conservation; economic benefits; intrinsic or spiritual values; multiple-use; recreation; natural resources; scientific values; social values; and wilderness. Many of these values and beliefs appear to be influenced by the polarization within this social environment.

Agency and community perspectives about management priorities were identified. Agency priorities are included among the public desires and concerns identified by this work, but public priorities include a wider range of topic areas. Public priorities include: rights of way access to forest lands; maintaining local custom and culture; grazing management; information and interpretation about forest resources and use; litter control; Forest Service management approaches; monitoring, especially for grazing; OHV management; population change; forest

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restoration; special designations, especially wilderness; socioeconomic benefits to communities; and, timber harvesting and fire management.

Participants expressed a desire for a change in forest-community relationships, especially in the following areas: organizational processes that limit developing effective long-term working relationships; facilitating problem-solving and cooperative working relationships with diverse interest groups; ensuring fairness and openness in making management decisions; and, working collaboratively with communities and individuals.

Chapter 1. Gila National Forest

Within the Southwestern Region, there are approximately 21 million acres of national forest land and about 9 million acres are within New Mexico. The Gila National Forest (NF) in western New Mexico administers approximately 3.3 million of these acres. The Gila NF is the sixth largest national forest in the continental U.S. and the second largest in the Southwestern Region. It includes the Aldo Leopold Wilderness (about 200,000 acres), Gila Wilderness (about 560,000 acres), and portions of the Blue Range Wilderness (about 29,000 acres). The Cliff Dwellings National Monument, which is surrounded by the Gila NF, is located about 44 miles from Silver City. The majority of Gila NF managed lands are contiguous, although portions of the Burro Mountains are to the south and west of other forest lands. The Apache-Sitgreaves NFs is to the immediate west of the Gila NF and portions of the Cibola NF are to the northeast. Southwest of the Gila NF in Gila County there is also a portion of the Coronado NF administered by the Douglas District Office of the Coronado NF.

Table 1: Southwestern Region National Forests Ranked by Total Acreage

Southwestern Region	Rank by Size	Gross Acreage	NFS Acreage	Other Acreage
Tonto NF	1	2,969,543	2,872,935	96,608
Gila NF	2	2,797,628	2,708,836	88,792
Cibola NF	3	2,103,528	1,631,266	472,262
Coconino NF	4	2,013,960	1,855,679	158,281
Apache NF *	5	1,876,891	1,812,576	64,315
Coronado NF *	6	1,859,807	1,786,587	73,220
Santa Fe NF	7	1,734,800	1,572,301	162,499
Kaibab NF	8	1,600,061	1,559,200	40,861
Carson NF	9	1,490,468	1,391,674	98,794
Prescott NF	10	1,407,611	1,239,246	168,365
Lincoln NF	11	1,271,064	1,103,748	167,316
Sitgreaves NF	12	884,495	819,442	65,053
National Forests (12)		22,009,856	20,353,490	1,656,366

Source: USDA Forest Service http://www.fs.fed.us/land/staff/lar/LAR04/table3_r3.htm

The Gila NF elevation begins at about 4,200 feet, but several mountain ranges are within Gila NF boundaries, including the Black Range, the Burro Mountains, Mimbres Mountains, Mogollon Mountains, Pinos Altos Mountains, and the Tularosa Mountains. Whitewater Baldy Peak in the Mogollons is the highest in this portion of the state at almost 11,000 feet. Vegetation in the lower elevations is primarily pinon-juniper woodland that transitions to ponderosa pine and then mixed conifer forests at the upper elevations. The Gila River has headwaters just north of Silver City. It flows west to empty into the Colorado River. The San Francisco River and Whitewater River are also in the western portions of the Gila NF and both join the Gila River, with the San Francisco River entering at the Gila Box near Safford, Arizona. There are also three man-made lakes within Gila NF boundaries: Quemado, Snow, and Roberts. These are well used recreation sites valued by local residents as well as visitors from other portions of New Mexico and Texas.

The Gila NF has six Ranger Districts: Quemado, Reserve, Glenwood, Silver City, Black Range, and Wilderness. The Quemado District is part of the Apache-Sitgreaves NF that is administered by the Gila NF. The Reserve and Glenwood districts are each located in Catron County. The Silver City District is located in Grant County in the town of Silver City. The Black Range District is located in Sierra County in the community of Truth or Consequences. Mimbres, in

Grant County, is the site for the Wilderness Ranger District that services the wilderness Areas of the Gila NF.

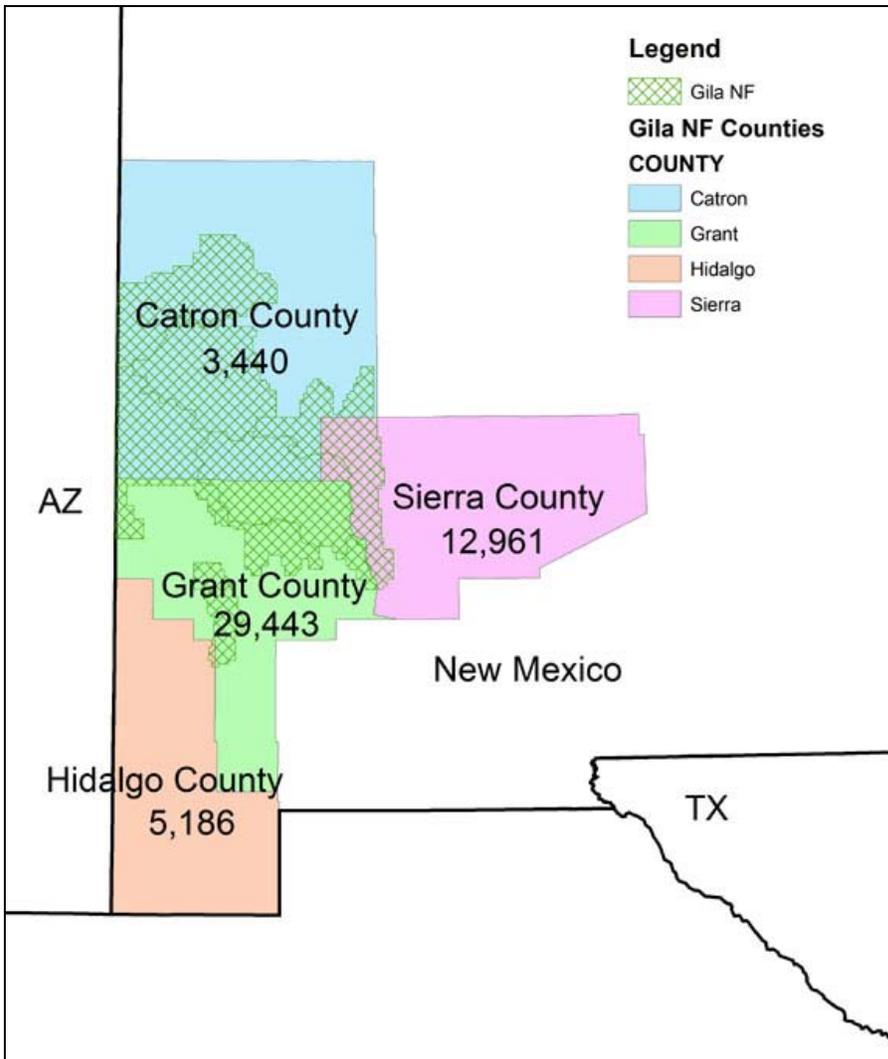


Figure 1: Gila National Forest Counties and Population

Chapter 2. The Socioeconomic Context

Land ownership, demography, and agriculture have some noteworthy characteristics within this social environment. About 45 percent of New Mexico lands are in public ownership, ranking 9th among the 50 states. Table 2 and Figure 2 compare land ownership in the four counties associated with the Gila NF. The three counties most directly associated with the Gila NF have high percentages of public land ownership. Federal ownership is highest in Sierra County, but it has the lowest percentage (14 percent) of Forest Service (FS) managed lands. Catron County has the highest percentage (50 percent) of FS managed lands and the second highest percentage of Federal lands. Sierra County also has a relatively high percentage of Federal lands (50 percent), the second highest amount of FS managed lands (~35 percent), and the most private lands among all the counties. These are noteworthy statistics about a social environment in which public lands are the majority in each county. Land for private development is limited by the percentage of public land ownership.

Table 2: County Land Ownership

County	BLM	FS	State	Private	Indian	Inland Water	Acres
Catron	581,435	2,217,036	533,037	1,081,779	0	900	4,414,720
Grant	385,575	884,383	367,685	878,238	24,000	0	2,540,800
Hidalgo	805,459	77,220	354,431	957,970	11,000	0	2,206,080
Sierra	822,175	378,665	361,195	474,655	0	34,000	2,700,160
							11,861,760

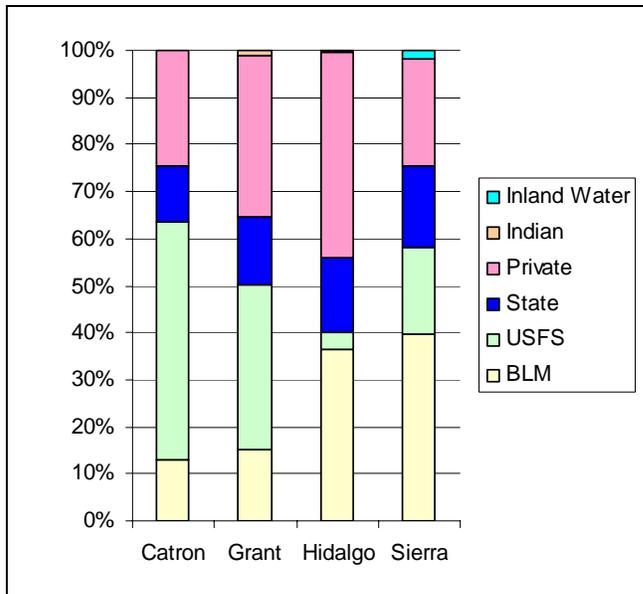


Figure 2: Gila NF County Land Ownership

These four counties have a total of almost 12 million acres, but each is sparsely populated. The total population of the four counties is about 52,592 based on U.S. Census 2003 population estimates. Figure 3 shows the percentage of total population for each county. The following bullet points summarize total population and population centers for each county.

- Catron County has about 3,400 persons, which is 6.7 percent of the project area population. Reserve is the County Seat and has a population of less than 400 persons. Glenwood, Pleasanton, and Aragon are other unincorporated communities within this county.
- Grant County is to the south and east of Catron County and has a total population of about 29,800 people, which is about 57.7 percent of the project area population. Silver City is the county seat and the largest community in this county (~10,000) and it is also the largest of all the communities associated with this forest. Bayard (~2,400), Santa Clara (~1,800), and Hurley (~1,380) are the other population centers in Catron County.
- Hidalgo County shares a border with Mexico and Arizona. It has a total population of about 5,234, which is 10.2 percent of the project area population. Lordsburg (~2,900) is the county seat and largest population center in the county.
- Sierra County is to the east of the Gila NF. The total population of this county is about 13,125 persons or about 25 percent of the total project area population. Truth or Consequences is the largest community with a population of about 7,000 persons. Elephant Butte, about 1,700 person, and Williamsburg (~500) are the other population centers in this county.

Table 3 summarizes recent demographic changes in counties surrounding the Gila NF. There are several noteworthy points:

- Between 2000 and 2003 New Mexico gained about 3 percent in population while each of the project area counties declined in population by about three percent. However, each of the counties shows an increase on population from the 1990-2000 census periods.
- Median ages are higher in Catron (47.8), Grant (38.8), and Sierra (48.9) counties than the national (35.3) median and New Mexico (34.6) median.
- There is variation among the four counties in the percentage of Hispanics in the population. Catron County is 19.2 percent persons of Hispanic origin, Grant County is 48.8 percent, Hidalgo County 56 percent and Sierra County 26.3 percent. New Mexico is 42.1 percent and the United States has 12.5 percent.
- For all counties, income is lower and poverty rates are higher when compared to state averages.
- The numbers of ranches and farms are decreasing, the land in farms and ranches is also decreasing, but the average size of ranches and farms is increasing.

Other rural communities in the west show similar patterns of demographic and economic change: overall population is increasing at higher than state averages; median age is increasing while the numbers of persons under 18 is decreasing; income is lower than state averages and poverty rates are generally higher; and, agriculture shows a pattern of operations increasing in amount of acreage while decreasing in overall numbers. These socioeconomic conditions and trends present challenges for all counties with this pattern. Other research is developing the details of socioeconomic change within these counties.¹

¹ At the time of the composition of this document, this work is ongoing by scholars at the University of New Mexico. It is organizing more detailed information about demography and economies in these and other counties associated with New Mexico national forests.

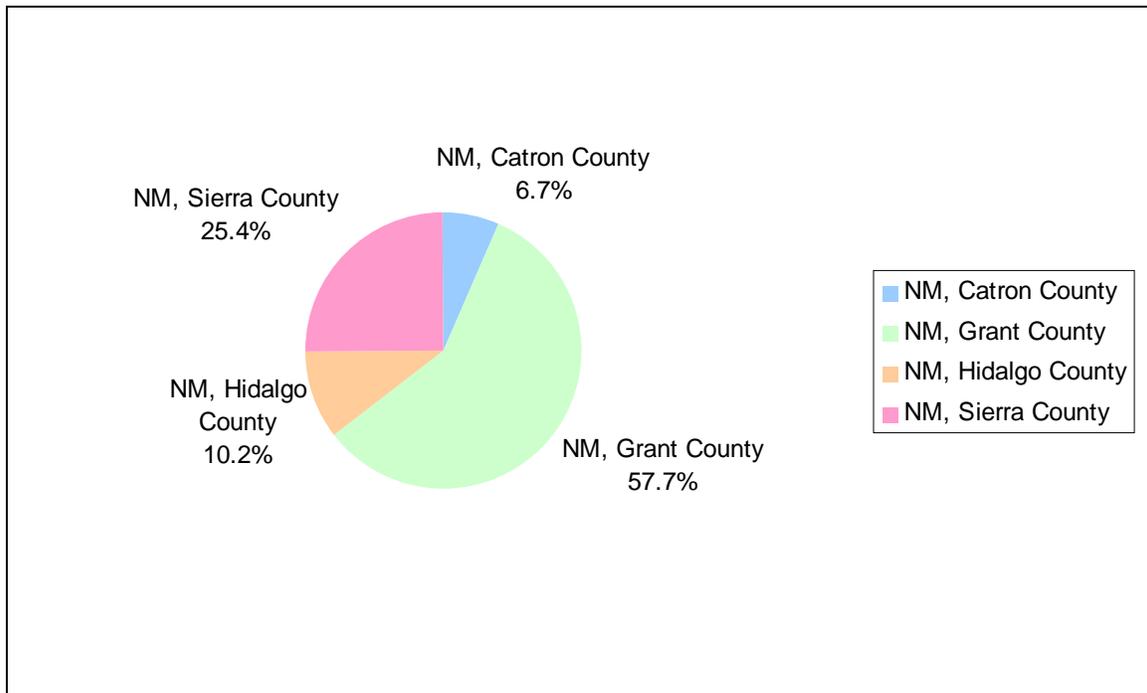


Figure 3: Gila National Forest Study Area Percentage of Total Population by County

People QuickFacts	Gila NF				
	New Mexico	Catron County, NM	Grant County, NM	Hidalgo County, NM	Sierra County, NM
Population, 2003 estimate	1,874,614	3,415	29,818	5,234	13,125
Population, percent change, April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2003	3.1%	-3.6%	-3.8%	-11.8%	-1.1%
Population, 2000	1,819,046	3,543	31,002	5,932	13,270
Population, percent change, 1990 to 2000	20.1%	38.2%	12.0%	-0.4%	33.9%
Persons under 18 years old, percent, 2000	28.0%	21.1%	26.2%	31.7%	20.1%
Persons 65 years old and over, percent, 2000	11.7%	18.8%	16.5%	13.6%	27.7%
Median Age	34.6	47.8	38.8	34.8	48.9
White persons, percent, 2000 (a)	66.8%	87.8%	75.7%	83.8%	87.0%
Black or African American persons, percent, 2000 (a)	1.9%	0.3%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2000 (a)	9.5%	2.2%	1.4%	0.8%	1.5%
White persons, not of Hispanic/Latino origin, percent, 2000	44.7%	75.8%	48.5%	42.7%	70.5%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2000 (b)	42.1%	19.2%	48.8%	56.0%	26.3%

Table 3: Gila National Forest					
People QuickFacts	Gila NF				
	New Mexico	Catron County, NM	Grant County, NM	Hidalgo County, NM	Sierra County, NM
Language other than English spoken at home, pct age 5+, 2000	36.5%	16.9%	36.7%	43.6%	21.6%
Median household income, 1999	\$34,133	\$23,892	\$29,134	\$24,819	\$24,152
Per capita money income, 1999	\$17,261	\$13,951	\$14,597	\$12,431	\$15,023
Persons below poverty, percent, 1999	18.4%	24.5%	18.7%	27.3%	20.9%
Land area, 2000 (square miles)	121,356	6,928	3,966	3,446	4,180
Persons per square mile, 2000	15	0.5	7.8	1.7	3.2
Agriculture					
Number of Farms 1997 to 2002 % Change	-15.1%	-28.0%	-26.9%	-18.2%	2.8%
Land in farms (acres, 1997 to 2002) % Change	-3.0%	-9.5%	2.5%	1.3%	5.7%
Average size of farm (acres, 1997 to 2002) % Change	14.4%	25.7%	40.2%	23.8%	2.9%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau 2002 People Quickfacts and USDA 2002 Census of Agriculture

Chapter 3. Data Collection Process

Data collection was accomplished by a combination of individual interviews and small group discussions. A listing of topics (included in Appendix) guided the interviews and the small group discussions. The guide topics were used to discuss how participants perceive issues rather than to elicit information in predetermined response categories. This approach is a discovery process to understand issues from a local perspective rather than using predetermined questions (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999; Bernard 1995; Spradley 1979). Consequently, the guide outlined general topics for discussion, but the interests and issues of concern to participants structured the information discussed. The guide was sent to participants before the sessions so participants would be aware of the topic areas for discussion.

Focus group sessions were recorded to ensure access to the most detailed information for analysis. Notes were also taken during the groups and key topics were summarized; and, the time mark in the audio recording for these points was noted to facilitate easy access for analysis. Segments within the recordings were identified by topic area and then coded using a combination of predefined and emergent codes. The predefined codes correspond to the topic areas in the discussion guide. The emergent codes were based on topics volunteered by participants. The analysis identified themes in the topic and emergent codes as well as participant statements to illustrate the content of the issues. The results of this qualitative approach (Dey 1993; Strauss 1987; Strauss and Corbin 1998) organize the presentation of results.

Individual interviews were conducted with persons who could not attend focus groups because of scheduling issues. County Commissioners and some of their staff, in Catron, Grant, and Sierra counties also participated in these interviews. The small group discussions were organized by interest group and held in two primary locations; Glenwood in Catron County and Silver City in Grant County. The interest groups represented were: forest products and ranching; recreation; community; conservation; and, resource professionals. The “community” group was composed of diverse interests, but with knowledge of communities and resource issues within this region. The “resource professions” were composed of biologists, economists, and other resource professionals with knowledge of Gila NF resources issues and their connections with local communities. Ranching interests included participants from Grant and Catron counties; and, timber interests were also from Catron and Grant counties. Conservation interests included the SW Center for Biodiversity, The Audubon Society, the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, and local watershed groups.

Approximately 51 persons participated in individual and group interviews. Additional follow-up interviews were conducted with four persons to clarify issues and develop more details about specific topics. The Catron County meeting was attended by seven people. This was held in Glenwood at a local park pavilion on a weekday afternoon. The Silver City meetings were held in the late afternoon (4 p.m. to 6 p.m.) at a meeting facility. These meetings had an average of about eight people, with the largest group composed of nine individuals and the smallest six people. The meetings ranged in length from 2 to 2½ hours. The following summarizes participation in group and individual interviews.

- (1) Catron County Commissioner and (1) Advisor
- (3) Grant County Commissioners
- (2) Sierra County Commissioners and (2) Staff
- (6) Conservation Interests Group
- (7) Forest Products and Ranching Group

Chapter 3. Data Collection Process

- (9) Community Interests Group
- (7) Resource Professionals Group
- (8) Recreation Group
- (9) Individual Interviews

Chapter 4 . Results

The information collected from focus groups and individual interviews expresses diverse views from individuals in Catron, Grant, and Sierra counties. The information collected focuses on beliefs, values, and perceptions of Forest Service (FS) lands and management issues as well as basic information about the social environment. Beliefs and values are culturally based patterns of thought (Spiro 1984). They are components of a world view that contain “explanatory models” that apply reasoning about causes, processes, and outcomes of the commonplace and extraordinary events in daily life (e.g., Hutchins 1980; Holland and Quinn 1987). Cultural models exist for many aspects of life, including values and beliefs about the relationship of humans with nature (Kellert 1995). Models about nature vary within American culture and include utilitarian (focused on the use of resources), biocentric (focused on the biological processes in nature), anthropocentric (focused on the benefits of nature for man), as well as other types of explanatory models that the literature suggests exist in various regions of the United States (Ellen and Fukui 1996; Soul e and Lease 1995; Kempton, Boster, and Hartley 1995).

Values and beliefs are part of an explanatory system with implications for how issues are perceived and identified, the functioning of a natural system such as a national forest, and the perceived outcomes or solutions to identified problems. Understanding the types and range of explanatory models is as important as understanding specific beliefs and values. Explanatory models also exist within a social framework affecting individual and group actions. This social context or social environment is fundamental to understanding the implications for actions taken or anticipated by individuals and groups. It also calls attention to the integration of values and beliefs with their social context, since when there is discontinuity, it can result in feelings of alienation that may have social as well as individual psychological effects (e.g., Geertz 1973).

The Social Environment

Individual and group interview data collected for this work suggests particular characteristics influence values and beliefs about national forests and their management. These characteristics include the following:

- There is a cultural history of Native American, Hispanic, and North American use of and residence within this region. This cultural history implies a diversity of values, beliefs, and practices associated with forest lands and resources.
- This region has a social identity as an “out of the way” place that is geographically and socially isolated. This social identity values rural self-reliance in which individuals at once depend on their neighbors for assistance, but also value independence. Skepticism about “outside” influence and especially governmental influence is part of the social history and culture of this region.
- There is skepticism about the intentions and authority of government, especially Federal Government entities. This is based on historical experiences as well as belief systems that stress the importance of local knowledge and face-to-face relationships.
- The region is characterized by transitioning economies and lifestyles that have traditionally been based on natural resource development activities such as the timber industry, cattle and sheep grazing, and mining. There is a perception of increasing diversity in lifestyles, most recently retirees and others who are not dependent on local economies for their income.

- There are value and lifestyle conflicts about grazing in which one position perceives grazing as incompatible with the ecological conditions of this environment and the other assesses grazing as both environmentally beneficial and essential to preservation of a valued lifestyle.
- There is a local environmental presence that has actively pursued implementing values and beliefs about forest management and landscape conditions. From some perspectives, the presence of the Nation's first proclaimed Wilderness area has "focused the attention of environmental interests" on this forest. This creates sensitivity to environmental issues.
- The natural resources and rural lifestyle of this region are attracting "newcomers" seeking quality of life amenities; and, some newcomers prefer a status quo in community lifestyles and environmental conditions. Newcomers also may have a tendency to view natural resource issues in different terms than longer term residents (Smith and Kranich 2000).
- There is an "outdoor lifestyle" as described by participants. For example,
People who live here or move here have an outdoor lifestyle. At some point in their lives, everyone gets out there, even if it is just for cutting wood. It is a place where people engage the outdoors. We may have sixteen different reasons for being out there, but we are all out there because we enjoy the great outdoors. We may do it differently, but we are out there enjoying this vast country we have. ... It is important for all of us to respect our fellow outdoorsmen....

These characteristics imply a mix of values and beliefs based on types of use, length of residence, and cultural background. This diversity of views is a self-defined characteristic of this social environment:

Look around here; we have as many points of view about the forest as exist anywhere. We have hikers, birdwatchers, backpackers, ATV riders, horseback riders, cattlemen, hunters, fishermen, and almost any kind of activity you can think of. It is just that kind of place.

However, these diverse views and especially those concerning cattle grazing have created social and individual tensions. As one participant noted:

There is all this talk about cattle and the damage they cause and well I just get tired of dealing with it. Things are just tense all the time. You never know what is going to happen, who is going to file an appeal, and if you are going to have your allotment cut back or what. It makes life harder. It didn't use to be that way, but it is a very tense life here now.

These individual tensions are partially a product of a social environment that is "polarized" by conflicts about resource uses, particularly grazing and wilderness. "Environmentalists" and "Wise Use" advocates or "environmentalists" and "ranchers" are the groups usually defined as representing the "polar" positions. Participants in the group and individual interviews identify these two apparently conflicting positions; and, these conflicts were evident in the verbal interactions among participants in some groups. The duration and intensity of these conflicts is also indicated by a record of newspaper and magazine articles about grazing and related issues (e.g., Davis 2001; Jones 1996). This climate of conflict appears to be pervasive, but there are some local groups composed of a cross-section of diverse interest that are working together in collaborative efforts. Individuals involved in these efforts suggest they focus on a "zone of agreement" and exclude dealing with divisive topics:

We talk about what we can agree on and how we can collaborate. We don't talk about cows. We especially don't talk about cows in the wilderness. It is important to stay focused on our common ground and try to work together to take some small steps.

In what is perceived to be a social environment characterized by conflict and “polarization,” there is thus some history of attempts at collaboration such as the Sheep Basin Restoration Project as well as collaboration among diverse interests to process small diameter wood from small-scale thinning projects.

Collaboration efforts do exist, but contentiousness about forest management and lifestyles are expressed in many participant comments about resources beliefs and values. This contentiousness is apparent in various statements about forest values and management concerns. The ability to develop more than the rhetorical positions that divide persons was difficult in some groups in which participants held conflicting views. These rhetorical positions are interpreted by some participants as resulting in a “willful misunderstanding” of the positions of others, the facts about issues such as wolf reintroduction or the possibility of resources benefiting from grazing. That is, to defend what is perceived to be a position under siege, individuals distort, misstate, or misinterpret facts. This dynamic of willful misunderstanding resulting from polarization and social conflicts may have affected the beliefs and values expressed in the interviews collected for this work. However, diverse information and points of view were expressed. There is some consistency of this information with data collected for this project from other social environments. It is important to acknowledge these influences on beliefs and values in a social environment wherein conflicts about natural resource issues predominate. However, this only further illustrates the necessity to understand the relationship of a social environment to the values, beliefs, and cultural models that influence beliefs and values about forest resources and their management.

Beliefs and Values about Forest Lands

Several categories of beliefs and values about forest lands and their management were identified in the data: forest characterization; conservation values and beliefs; economics; intrinsic or spiritual values; multiple-use values, recreational values, resource values, scientific values, social and heritage values, and wilderness values and beliefs. These categories contain specific beliefs and values that are summarized for each category. These categories aggregate the responses of individuals with diverse perspectives about forest values and beliefs about forest management to illustrate the themes that exist.

Questions about “how many” people hold these beliefs and values is a subject for survey research. Another equally valid question is regardless of the numbers of people that hold one position or another, what is the social or political power that allows one position or another, regardless of how widely held, to influence or appear to influence forest management decisions. While these questions are beyond the scope of this discussion, they are ones readers should consider.

Characterizations of Forest Lands: A Vast Landscape Rich in Biodiversity

There is both commonality and diversity in perceptions and assessments of the Gila NF as a landscape and national forest. The commonalities in beliefs about forest lands include the following:

- The Gila NF evokes a sense of “vastness” that constructs the forest as a large landscape. A newcomer described this “vastness” as follows:

This forest is the last frontier. It is so big, so vast, and you know you can ride in there and really get away. It is not that I don't like people, ... It is just nice to know there are places like this that are so big and you can be in there and if you want to, you never have to see another soul.

This expresses the value of forests as a place in which individuals can experience a sense of “aleness” that is facilitated by the “size” of the forest. A resident of Catron County expressed a similar observation:

It is not any one particular place that I like, but it is the whole thing, the size, the vastness of it. It is a large wild area and I value it for what it is.

The 3.3 million acres of this forest are a place in which people can lose sight of Silver City or Reserve and experience a place without other people, if they so choose. The ability to have a space large enough to evoke an experience of voluntary “social aleness” or solitude is an important value of this forest.

- The Gila NF is rich in wildlife, plants, trees, and other resources that indicate a varied and rich environment. The richness and diversity is inspirational. For example, one longer term resident of Catron County made the following observation about the importance of this biodiversity:

I was just driving through and decided to stop here. One thing lead to another. We went out for a walk on the Gila (river) and I was floored by the variety of birds, just all kinds of them. The wildlife and the plants just amazed me. I was hooked. Part of it was the place. Part of it was the people. But I couldn't get over just how much wildlife, vegetation, and richness there is here.

Another rancher from Grant County described his assessment of forest lands after returning from a time away:

The place gave me a sense of freedom. There were deer and bears and just this variety of things, right here out in the pastures. It is a hard thing to describe, but the freedom was a part of just how much there is here.

- The variety of the landscape as well as diverse resources is an important shared belief:
I like the high, the low, the in-between. The high-county on top of Whitewater Baldy and on the Crest Trail, being able to drive up the trail to 9,000 feet and then hike up to 11,000 feet then watch the stars at night. That is an amazing and awesome experience. Then the low country, the river, taking the Gila down through the Lower Box, going through the canyons on the way to the Box, it is just an amazing experience. The in-between, there are the trails throughout. We are having a blast riding the trails in the Burros, it is an amazing OHV area, right here in our own backyard.

This varied landscape is valued because it offers diverse experiences and it has some intrinsic importance as a quality that inspires appreciation of the natural world and the opportunity to enjoy it.

- There are “multiple-use” and “restricted-use” areas. The multiple-use areas are open to recreational, commercial, and other activities whereas restricted areas have limited uses. Multiple-use areas have various interpretations, which are discussed in a separate section about multiple-use values. Wilderness and roadless areas are the most commonly distinguished “restricted use” areas. The values and beliefs about these areas are also discussed separately. The important point here is there is some agreement these are two types of use areas within the forest.
- There are “easy access” areas and more remote areas of forest lands. The “easy access” areas are portions of the “multiple-use” forest that are nearby to campgrounds, picnic areas, or there is easy road access. The accessibility to local residents is also valued:

There are just so many areas right here close to Silver City. There is so much in the way of wildlife, quiet, and solitude. Just right across from Signal Peak ... you can see how things come back after a big burn, It is just a rich encyclopedia of what we have right here, close to us.

The accessibility of resources is especially important for those individuals who have limited time to enjoy outdoor activity or for whatever reasons have difficulty accessing back-country areas.

- The opportunity for solitude in an aesthetically pleasing environment is an important value of this forest. For example, in response to a probe about “favorite places” participants observed:
Well, I like the Gila. ... I like it because it is so unpopulated with human beings. You can get out by yourself and get away from people. There are gorgeous views and just beautiful country, but you can go for miles and not see another human being. ... I came here because of the Gila, the National Forest. I can ride out there and there is just no one out there. That area out there is where I spend most of my time when I am on the forest. I just like to have these natural resources available.

The opportunity to be away in an environment perceived to be vast, aesthetically pleasing, and readily accessible is an important shared characterization of forest lands.

- The “river itself” is valued as an important element of the Gila NF. The “river” most usually refers to the Gila River. Conservation, ranching, timber, and off-highway (OHV) vehicle participants each expressed appreciation for a water resource that contributes to the overall quality of life available in this region. One Silver City participant made the following observation that illustrates this point:

When we were kids, we used to float down the river. You would see all this wildlife. I didn't appreciate it at the time, but now when my kids float with me I tell them how lucky they are to see this. You can fish in it, swim in it, float down it, or just sit and watch it. I don't know what this place would be like without it, but that old saying that 'life is water' pretty much tells the story here.

This expresses the value of the river as a resource that is a valued component of participant perceptions of the Gila NF.

There are additional characterizations of forest lands that suggest differences in participant assessments of forest lands and natural processes. One of the noteworthy differences is the characterization of the forest as a “garden” that needs tending that contrasts with a view of

“natural processes” determining forest conditions. This is illustrated in the following excerpt from dialogue between participants in one of the groups:

Participant 1: *You know I think of the forest as a garden. Like any garden, you need to tend it, to get the weeds out so you can get the most from it.*

Participant 2: *You can't really manage Mother Nature; she does things at her own pace that is more like geologic time.*

Participant 1: *You can try. I think we can make it better if we actively manage it.*

Participant 2: *All we can do as people is to try to control the human influence on it. Nature has its own way of caring for itself. Humans aren't supposed to be messing with it. Like with fire in the wilderness, I think you just let it burn unless it is going to be a problem for private property.*

Participant 1 expresses a utilitarian view of the relationship of humans to forest resources while Participant 2 expresses what might be termed a biocentric perspective. Each view of the human-forest relationship implies a different assessment of appropriate management of forest resources.

A related difference is apparent in participant statements about a “holistic” rather than a predominately “single interest” assessment of forest resources. This difference is expressed in the following quotation:

We can all get caught in our own egocentric needs and desires for forest resources. But, growing up here, we were taught these things are a lot bigger than we are. We cannot look at this forest as a grocery store. We cannot look at it as a lumber yard. We cannot look at it as a grazing allotment only. What we need to do is look at this forest in a holistic manner.

While some may view forests as primarily a source of timber or a pasture for grazing, the holistic perspective views it as a resource that should serve multiple purposes, with no one use precluding other types of uses.

There are also other characterizations of resources that express differences in the values and beliefs about forest resources. These are summarized in the bullet list that follows:

- Participants agree there are some “damaged” or “abused” areas within the Gila NF. However, there are at least three different beliefs about why these areas are damaged. The first assessment is that damage is the result of unethical behavior by “a few bad apples.” A second assessment suggests abuse results from uses such as grazing and normal OHV use. This assessment suggests grazing and OHV use are activities that damage riparian areas; and, they are activities that can have high impact damage from what appears to be minor misuse. Other participants suggest damage in the forest is a result of overuse related to increased population pressures rather than any other single issue such as bad behavior, grazing, or OHV activity.
- There are various perceptions about the conditions of wilderness areas. For example:
If you go into the multiple-use areas, parts of it are just trashed with cans and bottles everywhere. It is a disgrace. It is the area mostly by the roads. If you get into the wilderness, then it is much cleaner out there. ... People who go back into the wilderness seem to care differently, you have that pack it in, pack it out mentality. That is what I see.

Another perspective suggests wilderness users also deposit their share of trash:

The backpack people are not any better than anybody else. I go out into the wilderness and I see just as much there as in the wilderness.

These perceptions appear to be related to more general wilderness values described in a subsequent section.

- The Gila NF is public land. Participants identify the Gila NF as “public” or “Federal” lands that are a resource for American citizens. However, points of view diverge substantially about who is most affected by management of these lands; and, if local and non-local residents should have the same “say” in determining use and management issues. One participant suggested:

I live adjacent to the Gila National Forest. But it is public land.... We need to keep in mind that whereas I might live adjacent to it, a homeless person in New York City has as much say about this public land as I do. It is public land for everybody.

The opposing view suggests that local residents should have more say than those who live outside the immediate area; and, some permittees suggest their contractual relationship with the FS should result in more “weight” being given to their issues and concerns.

These diverse views express important commonalities and differences about the Gila NF as a landscape. These commonalities and differences frame beliefs and values about the types of forest resources, resource health, and the management regimes required to meet the expectations of multiple stakeholders, local and elsewhere.

Conservation Values and Beliefs

Preservationist and conservationist are the distinctions participants make regarding beliefs and values about protecting forest resources. These are common distinctions in American culture that are described in the popular literature about orientations to natural resources (e.g., Chase 2001), philosophical discussions about environmental philosophy (Light and Rolston 2003; DesJardins 2001) and they can also be traced to contrasting perspectives articulated by John Muir (Muir 1980) and Gifford Pinchot (Pinchot 1908, 1903).

As described by participants in this work, the preservationist position believes that it is essential to protect natural resources from harmful human activity in the forest. This view emphasizes the intrinsic value of natural resources. The benefit to humans is evaluated as secondary to valuing these resources for their natural condition. Preservationist views are also described as focusing on protecting resources to benefit American society and humans in general. The conservationist position emphasizes the wise use of natural resources for the benefit of humans, but with attention to their sustainability. Conservationists also believe in “tending” resources or using “stewardship” to maximize their benefit to human society. Descriptions of the conservationist perspective also tend to focus on local benefits, but also acknowledge wider societal benefit:

We need wood to build our houses. It is a renewable resource we can care for and everyone benefits.

Both preservationist and conservationist perspectives emphasize a need for individual responsibility in caring for forest resources. For example, a newcomer and avid back-country forest user described his perspective about the need for personal responsibility to respond to changes in resource conditions:

During our watch, during my generation, things in many places have just gone to hell in terms of the quality of the resources; the earth, the water, and the air. ... Here we have a resource on the Gila National Forest we can do something about. ... Well, I hear what a dirty word 'environmentalist' is, but the fact is, we all have to be environmentalists in terms of conservation. I know when you say environmentalists, there is a specific reference, but we need to recover some good sense of that word in terms of conservation. The first rod and gun club I joined was all about conservation. That was the purpose of the club, to teach responsibility to the resources. That is how I still think about it.

A more "preservationist" perspective is illustrated in the following comment by another active user of forest resources:

We want it to be pristine. If you use the resource, then you have to make sure you can undue whatever you have done in your use of it. If you mar the landscape, then you should recover it to its natural state or better. I don't think people want to see the land left in bad shape. ... If someone goes in and logs and they make a road, they should undue the road so people are not driving on it. They have to restore it. It comes with the territory of using public resources. You go back and reclaim the land. That is the way we maintain a healthy forest. ... If your use is going to cause harm that cannot be undone, then that use shouldn't be permitted.

This quotation illustrates a view that human use should not have enduring effects of forest resources.

The conservationist view was expressed by participants from diverse perspectives, but especially by ranching interests and those who support ranchers such as local business persons and some long-term residents. This perspective has the following sub-themes:

- Ranchers and others who use the resource have knowledge of ecological conditions and processes based on long-term association with their lands through cycles of drought and wet years. The condition of the resource is an expression of their stewardship.
- Ranchers have a long-term self-interest in conserving forest resources. This self-interest motivates their desire to have healthy forest resources that sustain their lifestyle and provide an opportunity for their children to have a future in ranching.
- Conservation is enhanced by appropriate harvesting of resources; and, the use of these resources has important benefits to humans that are outweighed by any short-term damage.

From this conservationist perspective, actively harvesting and caring for resources is imperative to benefit humans and to create a healthy forest. From this point of view, man protects the resource through self-interest and active stewardship. A long-term resident and retired rancher expressed this conservation perspective as follows:

If you let the rancher and his cows out there in the forest, they will help the resource, not hurt it. Now there have been some abuses in the past, but ranchers want to see a healthy forest. When they are out there they watch the trails and they take care of the water troughs that are good for wildlife. The cows eat down the grass that can make a fire worse. A cow in the forest is a good thing, she can help out Mother Nature and the rancher does the same thing. He wants his children to see it and he will do what he needs to do so that can happen.

The value to future generations of caring for the land is expressed in this quotation from a rancher whose family has lived in Catron County for several generations:

Basically, I am a grazer. That is what I do. I want to leave my ranch for my kids. I want it to be in better shape when I die than when I took over. I want the watershed to be better, the grass to be better, and so many things that go into keeping up a ranch. I think that is a goal for all of us, to leave it better than we found it. I love that land and I want to improve it. I don't want to destroy it because if I do, I lose my livelihood. My kids also lose the opportunity to ranch.

Identifying conservation and preservation perspectives as the only viewpoints about caring for forest resources over-simplifies what is undoubtedly a more diversified set of values and beliefs. However, the prevalence of these stated perspectives is an expression of the polarization of values and beliefs about forest resources. Nonetheless, there is apparent agreement about conserving forest resources both for contemporary residents and for future generations.

Economic Values and Benefits

Most participants acknowledge local economies have changed since the mid 1980s. Forest resources continue to have economic benefit for local communities. Participants emphasized several types of contemporary and future economic benefits of forest resources: amenity benefits and values; commodity values; and restoration benefits and values.

Amenity Value of Forest Resources

This theme suggests that forest resources have economic value because they attract tourists, new residents, businesses, or other interests that appreciate the surrounding created by forest resources. In general, the amenity value of forest resources is perceived to increase in importance as commodity uses decline.

One clear theme about amenity values is the attraction of the forest for urban and other out-of-area persons seeking a rural forest environment:

There are people moving to a place called Indian Hills just north of Silver City and they like it there because the deer come down into their yards, so do the javelina and coatimundi. The forest is a source of wildlife people enjoy for consumptive use and for aesthetic use. They like to see them, or to hear them. The forest is an area for these animals to migrate out of to surrounding areas like Indian Hills. It attracts people who enjoy these things. That kind of amenity has economic benefit for Silver City.

People are more interested in the amenities and that is what is bringing people here. You talk to some people and they say that agriculture is the most important thing in this economy, but it is not. People are coming here because of the river and the Cliff Dwellings and other recreation opportunities. Agriculture has its place, but that is changing.

The future importance of these amenity values is further expressed in the following statement:

Some of the old guard is starting to realize the value of the river, the opportunities for recreation, wildlife viewing, and other types of non-consumptive uses that draw people. ... That is the future for Silver City. It is not in logging or mining.... Our future is in the fact that the forest is just there for a whole lot of people to enjoy.

This perspective emphasizes the economic development potential for the amenity value of the forest, especially with the decline of commodity uses.

Ranchers are taking advantage of the hunting opportunities offered by wildlife on the Gila NF by developing outfitting and guiding businesses. This is an adaptation to the economic realities of ranching in southwestern New Mexico, but it is an adaptation not necessarily suited to all ranchers:

The outfitter and guide business in Catron County has grown substantially and to some extent it has replaced logging and other things. But you take some old bowlegged rancher in Catron County who has not done anything in his life but ranching and it is kind of hard for him to think about doing recreation-based ranching. He is still trying to ranch. When I see those kinds of persons working out there, making their living on the land and just hanging on, well I just wonder about their future and if they can make the transition.

The theme of transition is embedded in these notions about the amenity value of forest resources. In some instances, amenity value is contrasted with commodity value since extractive uses are perceived by some participants as diminishing the aesthetic values of forest resources. However, there are also statements suggesting no apparent inconsistencies between amenity value and the presence of extractive uses such as timber harvesting and grazing. This point of view emphasizes the necessity for management that focuses on the coexistence of these two values and benefits of forest resources.

Commodity

Among some residents, especially in Catron County, an essential value of forest resources is their potential to provide an income. For example, one resident described his view of the value of forest resources in the following terms:

For the people trying to eke out a way of life here, those resources are the only source of wealth there is for us. And by wealth I mean enough money and property to be healthy. We aren't talking BMWs. Those resources are there to be used and they should benefit us. They do have aesthetic value and recreational value and religious value too, but they are there to be used. The Forest Service needs to have economists on their staff helping them to understand how to use those resources to benefit people like us who live here.

A similar perspective is expressed in the following quotation from a long-term Silver-City resident:

Hunting, grazing, timbering, we should be using those resources. They are renewable resources and we should be able to use them. The Forest Service should be working with us and working with New Mexico Game and Fish to create some opportunities.

Timber harvesting, cattle grazing, and wildlife are the most frequently mentioned commodity benefits of forest resources. Participants note that in the more southern portions of the forest, commodity benefits were secondary to mining for local economies. In the northern portions of the forest such as around Reserve, these benefits are more important to local communities and lifestyles.

In this part of the forest, the southern part, grazing and timber have never been that big a deal in the local economy. That is different in the northern part where timber and grazing

have been more important. But, the economy has changed so dramatically that it is important to acknowledge that. We are not that dependent on timber and grazing, but it is important for us to respect the contributions and lifestyles of the ranching folks who are our neighbors. We can appreciate the contribution they did make and still make, but we also need to acknowledge things have changed.

Some participants note that the economic value of grazing is changing in some areas where ranches are being sold to persons from out of the immediate area:

Around here (Grant County) you have airline pilots and plumbers from Minnesota buying in-holdings with a grazing permit. So, you have people with grazing permits and their livelihood is not centered on their permit. There is tremendous volatility in grazing permits, maybe 10 to 20 percent turn over because they are very marginal. In the southern part of the forest, the whole economic importance of grazing permits and the economic involvement has changed ... because of national economics. The younger people also have higher expectations than living on ten thousand dollars a year. ...

A different assessment of the economic value of grazing resources is also expressed by environmental stakeholders who question the economic viability of grazing in comparison to other uses of forest resources:

We need to take into account a fragile landscape that is not doing well and the cattle industry is not well-regulated. They use most of the water ... The product that is being provided from grazing is not as valuable as the resource itself. It needs to be managed so that we can preserve the mystique of the west, but still preserve the resource.

In contrast, grazing supporters suggest that the economic benefits that result from recreation users and others who are attracted to Gila NF amenity values is not substantial. These supporters suggest these out-of-area visitors purchase most of their supplies before they leave home and therefore the benefits to local businesses are limited. These supporters suggest there is important value in having economic diversity in these small local economies and grazing and timber harvesting provide that opportunity for diversification.

Some participants stressed the forest offers other economic development opportunities that are also “environmentally friendly.” As with many small communities surrounding national forests in the west, the option for a biomass plant is one perceived use of small diameter timber and other vegetation that can benefit forest health and local economies. The Grant County Jobs and Biodiversity Project is another example of efforts to use forest resources to create jobs that are “environmentally friendly.” This project is focused on forest restoration work, which is perceived by various participants as a potential economic benefit for local communities.

Restoration

The Grant County Jobs and Biodiversity project is one example of an effort to develop economic benefit from using the products from thinning and small-scale timber sales. The goal of this project is stated by the organization as follows:

(This) is a community-based organization that recognizes the potential to stimulate small business and job creation in the local community through forest ecosystem restoration

projects. The group is working hand-in-hand with other organizations to find economic uses for restoration by-products, such as small diameter trees.

Diverse participants expressed opinions that forest restoration offers the opportunity to develop community-based economic diversification. For some, this is perceived as an alternative to the reality of the constraints on timber harvesting. For others, it is perceived as another “environmentally friendly” economic opportunity that benefits the forest and supports local communities. However, some advocates for this type of economic value note there are also constraints for small-scale community-based entrepreneurs who wish to engage in restoration work. For example,

There are programs like the CFRP (Collaborative Forest Restoration Program), it is a remarkable program. But there needs to be more programs that will funnel money into restoration projects. And there are problems there in understanding small-scale operations. The Forest Service has to understand, rich people are not out there thinning forests. The people out there doing the thinning can't pay the workman's compensation insurance to get out and do the work Right now the Forest Service is cutting the people who can help us do that. ... If it is public land, then they need to put some money into restoration.

Intrinsic or Spiritual Values

The label “intrinsic or spiritual” is a construct from various participant statements about a value of forest resources that is non-materialistic. An element of this value is that forest resources exemplify non-human processes and influences, which participants describe as enabling an understanding of human presence in the natural world.

Some participants describe this as a “spiritual” value while others express a similar sentiment without the “spiritual” label. Regardless of the terms, the substance of the idea is essentially the same: there is value in knowing places exist in which natural processes prevail over the effects of human actions. From this perspective, humans can perceive they are part of a larger natural world with processes that have their own structures and rhythms. One conservation participant made the following observation suggesting this transcendent quality of forest resources:

There is just value in knowing there is a part of the world in which human actions are inconsequential in the grand scheme of things. When I visit the forest I get the sense of being part of a larger set of processes in the world.

Another long-term resident who is a business person expressed a similar sentiment about visiting the forest:

I don't get out there (forest) much anymore, I am too busy, but every once in awhile I go. When I was younger I would go just to experience the peacefulness of it. It was almost like church: you could feel the presence of God working there.

In different words each quotation expresses an experience of connection with larger life and spiritual processes that are evoked by the forest. The value results not only from direct experience, but also from “knowing it is there.” As a conservation participant observed:

Someone from New York City can value the forest for its intrinsic resources. It can be important to them to know it is there and it has value as something that functions primarily by

natural processes. People who live here can have that value too. You don't have to visit the forest to understand this intrinsic value.

Participants believe the intrinsic or spiritual value pertains to those who directly visit the forest as well as those who simply know of it. Those who visit the resource can directly experience its spiritual or intrinsic value. Those who know of it and may live elsewhere benefit by knowing places exist in which natural processes are not overwhelmed by human actions.

Participants also describe a need for this intrinsic value, especially for urban residents who visit forests as one means to relieve stress. One outfitter described the benefit of this intrinsic value for his clients:

They come here and you can see for the first day or so they aren't quite away from it all yet. Then, they settle into it and you can see the lines go away on their faces. People like that need places like this where they can get away from the stresses of the city. The more the population grows, the more we need places where people can get some stress relief.

In this sense, the forest environment offers urban as well as rural residents a psychological resource.

Multiple-Use Beliefs

Participants expressed two major themes in beliefs about multiple-use. One theme is a general belief about the desirability of multiple-use and the other is about resource abuse.

Participants distinguish “multiple-use” and “wilderness” areas of the forest. This is a social as well as a use distinction. As a social distinction, the Gila is described by some as a “blue-collar” forest or the “working person’s forest” that is used by working-class residents in their time away from work and on their vacations.

There are no huge houses around the Gila. There are no places for big powerboats the way you see around some of the other forests. It is a place that gets heavily used in the exterior points in the summer time and on the weekends, but not in the middle. Memorial Day, 4th of July, and Labor Day are the big days.

The multiple-use portions of the forest are perceived to be used predominately by “working persons” who do not have the extended time to access the wilderness. The easily accessed “exterior points” are thus ones used for picnics, fishing, walks, OHV riding, and the range of activities that people seek for their outdoor experiences. Wilderness is perceived by some as used by “a different class of person.”

The perception of public land that is available for any type of use anywhere is troublesome for some participants. A Silver City businessman made the following observation about the potential for abuse from “multiple-use”:

Multiple-use means it is the forest and anybody can go out there and do anything they want. That is not a good thing. We have people living out there. There are people who think you can go out there and live for a month at a time. There are people who poach game, poach firewood where they are not supposed to. They ride 4-wheelers and ATV's where they shouldn't. There is no control. A lot of it is lack of education. For the most part, most people

want to do the right thing. There are always bad apples, but around here, people assume you can trash the place and it is up to someone else to clean up the mess.

Participants generally support the concept of multiple-use. Some participants describe what might be termed a belief about “sustained use” as applying especially to the multiple-use areas of the forest. The substance of this belief is expressed in the following quotation from a multi-generation resident and resource professional:

Use it respectfully. You can't abuse it. You have to use it in a way that we are allowed to get pleasure out of it and get the natural resources we need out of it. We also have to protect it for the next generation and the next generation. We leave it a little better than we found it. Don't trash places, don't clear cut it, don't wipe out watersheds, and don't build roads in every corner of it. ... As places grow we need these multiple-use areas even more than ever before, but we have to keep in mind that it needs to be managed so it will be there to meet those needs.

Residents acknowledge there are problems with incompatible uses. There is some shared perception that hunters and some “bad apple” OHV riders are the primary abusers within the multiple-use forest. The tendency of hunters on all terrain vehicles (ATVs) to go off-trail to retrieve game or to seek out game is cited as a particular problem. Beliefs about cattle grazing on the multiple-use portions of the forest reflect the two poles of concern about cattle grazing: either it is perceived as compatible with other uses or it is perceived as incompatible because it adversely affects forest resources. The former position is illustrated in the following quotation:

We used to have multiple-use and now we don't. Multiple-use can be beneficial to the land. There are places cattle can be and it will be beneficial. There are places you can have OHVs. We need management and we need sharing. We are heading down the road of trying to push all the uses out, except backpacking. ... I don't particularly like to see cattle, but with management, it is a legitimate use.

For this participant, efforts to exclude cattle from multiple-use areas is a sign of restricting a wider range of uses so that “only backpackers” will be allowed in the forest.

The opposing position advocates for elimination of cattle from multiple-use because it is perceived to be fundamentally incompatible with other uses:

Multiple-use is valid as long as no other use significantly affects other uses. Grazing greatly affects other uses. It has created more endangered species than anything else. So, it is an incompatible use They have tried to properly manage it for so long, and it has not worked. The only solution is to stop it. It is not economical and it is harmful to the landscape. Where is the benefit to others from allowing that type of use?

Discussions about “multiple-use” evoke the rhetoric of opposing positions. Multiple-use beliefs become one expression of differences about key values regarding who is using the forest for what purposes, in what places, and for what benefit to local residents and national stakeholders.

Recreational Values

Recreational opportunities are a highly valued benefit of the Gila NF. As one participant noted,

It is a playground for New Mexico.

The range of recreational opportunities is expressed in the following quotation by a forest user who also does some guiding:

We see people that just like to go out and drive the roads through the forest and they stop at the vistas and go: 'ooh and ah.' And then you have those folks who hike a little bit and they are not usually interested in the more difficult trails or the ones that are not maintained. Then there are those folks who go out for several days and they don't mind un-maintained trails. Then there are the fringe recreation users, the birders, wildlife photographers, and all of those folks. There are mountain bikers and road bikers. One of the biggest assets of our forest is Highway 15 and 35. They draw people here.

Hunting is also noted as one of the important recreational uses for local residents as well as those from out of the area who visit to hunt elk. Declining deer herds, the introduction of wolves, and perceptions of increasing numbers of predators are topics that concern the use of forest lands as a recreational resource. There is some belief the FS should work closely with New Mexico Game and Fish to promote habitat for game that will benefit hunters.

As noted several times in this report, the accessibility of forest resources to local users is an important recreational value. Participants note that modern life consumes large amounts of time that limits their ability to travel for vacations or have extended amounts of time away from work. The ability to access the forest for short periods of time after work and on weekends is a valued recreational benefit of the Gila NF.

There is recognition of increasing pressure for recreation opportunities, especially during the summer months. There is some belief this increasing pressure will degrade the overall recreational value of the Gila NF. A theme about responding to this increase in recreational pressure is to sacrifice some areas to protect others. For example:

There are going to be certain areas you just have to sacrifice. You will have to target certain campgrounds for heavy use with the idea that you sacrifice those areas to protect other areas. So you don't have too much damage. As the next 20 years unfolds in the Southwest, there is going to be a big increase in recreational demands and you have to respond to that.

Another theme about response to increased recreation pressure is to limit the numbers of persons who can access multiple-use areas in groups:

It might be worth considering something like the twelve heartbeats rule. ... That means you limit the use in the forest to groups of no more than twelve heartbeats to address potential for over-use. That can be ten people and two horses or six people and six horses. That has worked elsewhere and I think it can work here, too.

The perception of threat to existing recreational opportunities is noteworthy in a forest perceived to be so vast and varied. This clearly suggests the need for attention to recreational issues in future collaboration and planning efforts, given the values about the recreational opportunities of the Gila NF. Participants suggest with the "right" management approach, it is possible to retain existing recreational values. This hope is expressed in the following quotation by a long-term resident and conservationist:

I am a consumptive user myself. I fish and hunt. I don't see the forest being preserved like a museum, but with the right management we can promote public recreation, but it should be done in a low-key way. We can retain the forest's uniqueness if we just manage for future recreation use.

Resource Values

Resource values overlap with intrinsic, recreation, and other values and beliefs. However, there is a collection of associated beliefs and values that collectively define the natural environment of the Gila NF. These beliefs and values about the Gila NF's natural resources are abundant in the information collected for this work. Participant statements about these resources are often eloquent, reflective, and insightful. Analysis of these statements condensed this rich body of material into a summary of themes about specific resource values and beliefs participants expressed. However, it is the association of these resource values with one another that describes how participants view Gila NF natural resources.

Place

Let's face it, unless you are javelina hunting and you are only going to be there a couple of days, there aren't many people who want to go spend a week camped out ten miles from Deming, New Mexico. People plan their whole year around going to a particular campground on the Gila for ten or twelve days. Places like the Gila, they are part of what defines the west. A place like this is a contrast from the desert. The high mountains and streams, they are a magnet for people from all over. ... You can't reproduce this place. We need to conserve it.

The high mountains, moderate climate, and tree covered watersheds contrast with the desert lowlands in other parts of New Mexico and west Texas. These natural resources construct a setting that attracts new residents as well as visitors for recreation. The beauty and configuration of natural resources and climate is an important part of the sense of place that is satisfying to long-term residents. The economic and social trade-offs individuals make to live in this particular environment are expressed in the following quotation from a Catron County resident:

When I moved here in the early seventies I immediately had a tremendous increase in the quality of life me and my family experienced. The river is here, the wildlife, being in the mountains, these are all things that made me want to stay. ... We took a tremendous cut in pay to stay here. We could move to the city and make a lot more money. We learned to make do on a lot less by learning from the old-timers here. A lot higher income, a new car, a nice house, those don't have the value for me of being in this valley.

The sense of place among long-term and more recent residents has value that is recognized as a trade-off with the opportunity to have a higher income and more conveniences in a city or town. The "place" of the Gila NF and its configuration of natural resources is an important value for residents of this region.

Quiet

A resource value mentioned by multiple participants is the opportunity for quiet. The prevalence of statements about quiet may be a response to a high level of concern about OHV use. Nonetheless, this concern indicates an expectation of quiet or the prevalence of natural sounds

rather than man-made sounds as part of the resources offered by the Gila NF. A resource professional participant expressed this expectation and its value:

I was in California, in one of the wilderness areas camping. Day and night there were planes flying over. You could hear them at night, you could see their lights. That is one thing we don't have here. You can be out in the forest and never hear a plane or any other man-made sounds. I didn't know how lucky we are to have what we have here until we heard those planes in the middle of that California wilderness.

Although concern about OHV noise may contribute to the expressed values and expectations about quiet as a resource, this resource professional's statement indicates the opportunity for "quiet" or the absence of man-made sounds is a valued resource.

Resource Bank

There is a theme in various participant statements about the Gila NF as having future value as a storehouse for recreation, aesthetic, and scientific resources. Some elements of this theme are related to beliefs about potential effects of population growth on the availability of recreation resources. For example:

We aren't growing any new national forests. As the population grows, we need to have places people can go for recreation. We need to protect what we have so it will be there for other generations.

Other elements are related to concerns about preservation of resources that may have future value:

As more and more species get discovered that have value for cancer research or whatever, it is always nice to have someplace that has viable genetic stocks or species that may be important in the future.

Whether for recreation, aesthetic, or scientific purposes, the natural resources of the Gila NF are perceived to have value as a "resource bank" that can be used in the future for multiple purposes.

Water and Watersheds

A strong theme in participant's statements is the watershed value of the Gila NF. In a water-limited environment, water has a high value as a natural resource; and, participants emphasize the value of the Gila NF as a watershed that benefits local residents as well as the entire southwestern ecosystem:

They have to treat the forest like what it is: a watershed. Without the water there isn't anything, without the mountains and the forest then you don't have anything. The Gila is a watershed that is invaluable for us, for everyone in New Mexico too.

Participants believe the rivers and riparian areas in the mountains are valued areas that require protection from damage. However, there is also a recognized value to the rivers as well as the mountain watersheds. One Silver City resident expressed the value of the rivers as a quality of life benefit as well as a potential tourist attraction for other residents of the Southwest:

The Gila River is a tremendous resource here. The opportunities for river running, fishing, and birdwatching are a unique resource for people here and for those who want to come here. We just had the Gila River Festival and all people saw that and now the local chamber of commerce is taking an interest.

The rivers and watersheds combine with other resources such as the mountains, forests, climate, and wildlife to create an environment perceived as “a special place.” Water is essential to the “special” quality of the Gila NF expressed by participants.

Wildlife

There are several themes about the value of wildlife as a natural resource: (1) wildlife provides hunting opportunities; (2) residents enjoy viewing wildlife in the natural setting of the forest; (3) the diversity of wildlife contributes to the intrinsic value of the forest; (4) the forest creates habitat for wildlife that spreads to surrounding areas; (5) wildlife offers the potential for commercial benefit by attracting hunters, birders, and wildlife viewers; and, (6) forest management has changed wildlife habitat to favor some species (e.g., bears and elk) more than others (e.g., deer). There are also themes about specific species such as the value of elk for hunting, the causes of decreasing deer populations, the threat or opportunity presented by wolf reintroduction, and the controversy about Spotted Owls and Gila trout. A significant amount of the dialogue in focus groups about wildlife appears to be related to the polarization about natural resource issues in general. Although wildlife is clearly an important resource valued by diverse participants, community polarization appears to influence the expression of these values. The following exchange in one focus group illustrates how wildlife values are connected with the polarization about grazing and other forest management issues:

Participant 1: *Deer are here and there. You see more deer in Silver City than you do almost anywhere else in the forest.*

Participant 2: *I see white-tails in the Burros, up high on the top of Jack's Peak. I got on top of the peak and there they were. So, there are deer around in more places than the front yards in Silver City.*

Participant 1: *What is interesting is that there is cattle grazing there (Jack's Peak area) now and the deer are doing real well. ... What we should push for is multiple-use. When we had multiple-use, then we had game. When we had logging, we had more game. When cattle were in the forest, there was more game. If you eliminate all this stuff (logging and cattle), then you lose the game. We need multiple-use, it will benefit the wildlife. You used to be able to go up there and see deer in every draw. Now you can't see any at all. ... It is because we are losing multiple-use.*

Participant 2: *The forest is going through an evolution. Things are changing and it is not always forest management. Deer populations have declined because of wasting disease and other things, so there is no need to be reactionary. ... You see more deer in those areas that are freshly burned. Natural fires and prescribed burns will help wildlife populations here as much as anything.*

Participant 1: *Everybody should be working to increase our deer herds because it takes a big prey base to support the predators that people want to have here like the wolf. If you want more deer, then you need to open up the forest, cut some trees so there is habitat for them. If you want to have wolves here, then manage the forest so they have the deer.*

In this exchange one participant suggests that natural processes and not necessarily specific forest management policies are responsible for changes in wildlife populations. The other participant links multiple-use with healthy wildlife population; and, the decline in wildlife is perceived to be related to restrictions of uses such as logging and grazing. This “conflict dialogue” is present about wolves, deer, and even birds. For example, participants agree that the Gila NF has an especially rich bird population that is enjoyed by residents and visitors alike. The value of riparian areas as habitat for bird populations is also acknowledged by diverse participants. Yet, some “environmentalist” participants emphasize that by protecting riparian areas, which are prone to damage from grazing, bird populations can thrive and therefore benefit local economies by attracting “well heeled” birders. In response, the opposing position suggests that birders contribute less than hunters:

I know this outfitter and they make a couple hundred a day taking people in to hunt. But, I have never heard of him taking in a birder or someone that wants to hear wolves howl. The wolf people and birders are not paying that kind of money, but the hunters will.

The dialogue about birds and birding expresses a theme in participant statements about wildlife as an indicator of the value of particular forest management policies.

Wildlife is clearly a valued resource that contributes to the quality of life in this region for a variety of residents and for a variety of reasons. However, expressions of this value are influenced by the polarization of beliefs about forest management issues such as grazing and logging.

Scientific Values

Some participants believe the Gila NF has unique scientific value. These participants suggest this value derives from a combination of characteristics: (1) the “vast” size of the forest; (2) the relatively limited amount of dwellings within and adjacent to forest lands; (3) the amount of relatively undisturbed wilderness; and (4) the rich biodiversity of forest resources. Some participants perceive this configuration of characteristics offers science a unique opportunity to observe a functioning southwest ecosystem, especially the interaction of the Gila NF with fire, the potential for restoration of threatened or endangered species, and how southwestern forests are changing. Several quotations from participants express their views about this scientific value:

The value of this forest is more than for just the people who live adjacent to the forest. One of the interesting things about the Gila is that it is so big, and so few people are in it or on the edges of it. In terms of understanding how western forests and particularly southwestern forests work, this is the place. We don't have lots of small places within or next to the forest, so we can have a 60,000 acre fire and it can burn without threatening people and you can learn something about fire in this and other southwestern ecosystems. ... This is the one place in the Southwest and maybe the west where you can have (natural processes) working together and the “laboratory” value of that fact is important.

Another participant in considering the size and nature of the ecosystem offered the following comment about the potential to understand the natural processes of ecosystems:

You can do things on the Gila in terms of wildlife you cannot do elsewhere. You can reintroduce wolves, maintain native fish populations, and see how these populations function in a relatively intact ecosystem. The Gila River is the last river in the U.S. with its own native

fish. Some of them are pretty scarce, but they are still there. It is unusual, because the Gila is in relatively unmodified condition and we need to keep it that way.

The “laboratory” offered by the Gila NF is valued because it offers broad social and ecological benefits. There is an underlying theme in these statements, each made by conservation interests, of the importance of maintaining the Gila NF as a “relatively undisturbed” natural environment or at least not undermining the scientific value by excessive disturbance.

Social Values

The social value of the Gila NF is usually expressed as the relationship between local “custom and culture” and the use of forest resources. These sentiments are similar to those expressed by ranching interests described in other reports for this project. These sentiments include; (1) long-term attachment to and local knowledge about grazing allotments; (2) the support grazing allotments offer to family ranching operations that might not be viable without access to public lands grazing; and (3) the value of maintaining western values of hard work, attachment to the land, caring for resources, and producing a product of national value. Ranching participants acknowledge the self-interest in their values about the interaction of ranching and public lands grazing. They also argue their self-interest has social benefits to American society, including preserving open space around forest lands that would otherwise be developed. For example, a multi-generation Catron County rancher observed:

The other day I was driving by the old Cox ranch. I used to help him gather up his cows and we helped each other out over the years. Now they are cutting that ranch up into forty acres or whatever the parcel size is. It just breaks my heart to see that. ... It is a loss of a way of life. ... I just don't believe the American people want to see that lost and they don't want houses built all around the forest. I know those people buying them want their piece of paradise too and I don't want to deny that to them. It is a hard thing.

This statement expresses a desire to maintain a way of life that is perceived to benefit forest resources as well as the rancher.

A strong theme in participant statements about “custom and culture” is the notion that their lifestyle is threatened by social, economic, and political factors that are largely outside of their control. The perception of a besieged way of life is well-expressed in the following quotation from a Grant County rancher:

My family came here in 1870. We have been here a long time and it has been a struggle the whole time. The Forest Service has tried to kick us out since we first came here. ... We love the wilderness and that is why we fight so hard to stay here. ... And if the environmentalists have their way, they will put me out. ...It is a way of life and when I am gone, it will be the end of our way of life.

There are a variety of economic and social factors challenging ranchers in the Southwest, including pressures for limiting or eliminating public lands grazing. These pressures challenge the value ranchers place on their way of life. In response, ranching interests argue their way of life offers benefits to forest resources and American society and this value should be considered in forest management decisions and planning.

Wilderness Values

There are two major themes about Gila NF wilderness areas. One theme expresses a positive evaluation of wilderness as a resource that preserves forest landscapes as they “always have been and always should be.” One participant expressed this value in the following terms:

My grandmother was from Reserve in Catron County. I know the wilderness was important to her. It was important to her just to know there is forest that is like it was in the time of our forefathers. She thought of it as a pristine area that should be protected and if it was not, then it would be developed like any other area. So, at least it is protected.

The wilderness offers “pristine wild space” that is an undeveloped forest resource for future generations. Wilderness areas are perceived to be rich in wildlife resources and important because nature is in a “natural state.” Wilderness is especially valued because its resources are undeveloped and largely unmanaged. Wilderness is also perceived as an essential contribution to water quality in this region:

Both the Mimbres and the Gila have their headwaters in the wilderness. It is important for that reason alone.

This perspective values wilderness as the “pristine forest” in which there should be limited human intervention.

The second theme about wilderness areas is a stark contrast. This view is expressed by a participant who characterizes wilderness as “green desert.” From this perspective, wilderness contains less wildlife and limited diversity of resources because it is unmanaged. Grazing and logging are perceived as appropriate tools to use in wilderness since these can address resource degradation and improve the quality and appearance of the landscape. This perspective sees a “hands-off” policy in managing wilderness as an attempt to restrict its use to a “special class” of people with the time and resources to visit this “green desert.” In a culture that places an important value on egalitarianism, this belief about wilderness as for a “special class” influences evaluations of the overall value and approaches to managing this resource.

Chapter 5. Management Priorities and Desired Futures: Agency and Public Perspectives

Gila NF staff identified four broad areas of concern for revision of the existing forest plan:

- Terrestrial and Aquatic Species and Habitats.
- Recreation (access, OHV designation, outfitter and guide capacity, wilderness management, and unmanaged recreation).
- Landscape health (grazing, fire, insect and disease, vegetation management).
- Social (economics and demographics).

Focus group and individual interviews also identified these four areas as concerns. However, participant assessments of management priorities and desired futures have a context that is influenced by several beliefs about forest management in general. These beliefs have the following themes:

- Climate and especially drought influence the success of forest management. Some participants emphasize the environmental challenges of managing a high desert and mountain ecosystem, especially one that is prone to drought.

The climate just happens and no matter what planning you do a drought makes a difference.

Planning and management is susceptible to climate factors such as drought that publics perceive can undermine any planning approach.

- The political context of forest management has resulted in resource management that is “out of balance.” Forest management is perceived to be influenced by the political agenda of different administrations, but also by local political pressure from stakeholder groups. The statement of one participant expresses a commonly expressed sentiment about this local political influence:

The pendulum has swung both ways. It went from appeasing the ranchers to appeasing the environmentalists. We cannot get caught in the moment. We need to look at the health of the forest, the nature of the resource. Until they can look at the forest more holistically, then the pendulum will swing back and forth and no one will be happy and the resource will suffer. We have to find a way that the use and care of the forest will allow humans to be in the forest in different ways and find a balance. Grazing, fire management, all those things, there has to be a balance.

There is a need for the agency to focus on balance in its management of forest resources without appeasing one advocacy group or another. As another participant suggested: The perception of undue influence by ranchers or environmentalists results in additional advocacy to respond to concerns about agency appeasement of “the other” group. Participants desire the agency manage resources without regard for political consequences or influence:

Don't lose sight of the fact that as you take into consideration all these different points of view, the resource has to be in the forefront. The resource comes first. You can get too static a picture with just thinking about one point of view or one desired future

- Management should focus on the “whole system” and not one issue or one species. Participants from various perspectives suggest a type of “one issue” management has decreased the effectiveness of overall forest planning and management or as one participant stated:

What you really keep in mind it is how you manage the whole system. Don't get stuck on just one thing, keep the whole system in mind. That is what is important.

Loggers may perceive the “one issue” is the “spotted owl” while environmental interests may perceive the focus for management is “maximizing grazing.” This is a direct corollary to the perception noted above of managing reactively in response to political pressure, only these beliefs suggest forest resources suffer because of focused attention to selective issues and not a longer range vision of forest health.

- Participants also suggest the agency’s ability to manage and to develop effective plans is compromised by decreasing budgets and the loss of personnel expertise. Participants suggest FS personnel respond to requests for management actions with statements about declining budgets and insufficient funds. Participants believe the agency’s ability to effectively manage forest resources in the future will be compromised because of a lack of funds, especially for personnel who are resource specialists in areas such as recreation, timber, archaeology, and grazing. Additionally, some participants suggest the agency has lost or is losing expertise in resource areas such as timber and grazing. This loss of expertise in resource critical areas is believed to be compromising the agency’s ability to effectively develop plans and conduct management activities. Furthermore, some interests perceive this will make future plans and management actions vulnerable to legal challenges.

These beliefs as well as the values and beliefs in the preceding section frame the following presentation of management concerns from a public perspective. The themes developed in the following discussion do not address all of the management issues and concerns identified by participants. For example, some participants suggest there should be attention to the danger to hikers and others of animal traps used by trappers; and, other participants expressed concern about particular invasive species such as yellow starthistle. And, other participants expressed concern about the costs and contracting procedures for specific projects or the possibility of renting fire towers as a means to increase income to the FS.

The themes below express the large-scale issues identified in focus groups and individual interviews. These themes exclude the localized and project-level issues expressed by some participants. This exclusion does not diminish the importance of these other issues. Instead, it expresses the focus of this work on broader strategic issues identified by diverse publics as important for consideration in forest plan revision.

Custom, Culture, and Local Knowledge

For some participants, the custom and culture of this region dates to thousands of years of pre-European settlement followed by an extended period of Spanish exploration and settlement. However, it is the more recent settlers who cut timber and raised cattle to support mining and the American settlement of this region who are most concerned about the effects of forest management of their custom and culture.

Ranching, timber, and some rural community interests suggest that the mission of the FS mandates consideration of the ways of life and economic well-being of communities surrounding

the forest. The rights and obligations of permitted users with legitimate claims to the use of forest resources are of special concern to these interest groups. They argue that communities developed a way of life dependent on the use of forest resources that also have wider social benefits through provision of commodities; and, they also suggest their knowledge of local conditions and ecological processes has direct benefit for the management of forest resources. Ranching interests argue their ongoing contact with land resources well-known to them benefits the management of these public lands:

Cowboying is not simple. Each allotment has unique conditions and it requires being out there on a regular basis, seeing it in the drought, seeing in the wet time, and knowing how it works and how much it can be used at different times. That is what we bring to it and the public benefits from what we know and our contact with the land.

These interests argue for future management policies that acknowledge the implied responsibility of the FS to those interests that have developed resources that have also benefited a wider range of social interests.

One rancher in Catron County described the value of his long-term perspective about caring for the land as an essential element of custom, culture, and local knowledge.

I have had a lot of run-ins with the Forest Service over the years, good and bad. I have yet to have one of those guys who was so concerned about what they called my 'mismanagement', they have not come back after they have retired to see how my ranch is doing. They don't have the feeling there like I have. I have a love for that land that is long-term. I don't want to see my ranch cut up into 40 acres. I want to care for it so it is there for the long-term. My joy in life is making that ranch better, putting in a pipe line, making sure a pasture is in good condition, those are the things I live for. ... This is my way of life and it is for the long-term.

Grazing

Grazing is perhaps the most contentious forest management issue discussed by participants in interviews and discussion groups. The substance of different views is described in values and beliefs about grazing. The management expectations and concerns about grazing generally follow the polarized positions, with only limited consideration of other than the polar opposite views. One position assesses grazing as unmanageable because of the ecological conditions of a water limited, riparian sensitive environment on the Gila NF. As one participant suggested,

Cows go where the water is. They go to the riparian areas and those are the sensitive areas on this forest.

Consequently, this position desires severe restrictions or elimination of grazing on this national forest because of the assessment that it has limited economic and ecological benefits, but a high potential for environmental damage.

The ranching position is related to beliefs about the benefits of cattle grazing for forest health, the benefits of grazing for wildlife, and beliefs about a way of life that might be threatened without access to public land grazing. Cattlemen and their supporters also suggest the maintenance of ranching around the forest maintains open space and thereby benefits the aesthetic and recreational values held by many users of forest lands. Ranchers desire support for grazing allotments and more understanding of the benefits of grazing for a variety of publics.

The intermediate position suggests a respect for the values and traditions of ranchers and a consideration of the potential benefits to forest resources if grazing is properly managed. While this position was a minor theme in the data, it does indicate some potential to engage in problem solving and management that can both support grazing and maintain the ecological integrity of riparian areas and other ecological conditions of concern to environmental interests.

Information, Interpretation, and Education

A desired future management priority is for more attention to providing information and education to forest visitors about expectations for behavior and forest ecological conditions and processes. This is partially a response to perceptions about declining conditions in some portions of the forest, such as the litter problem discussed below, and assessments of “bad behavior” especially from OHV users, hunters, and others. Participants offered two perceived solutions to these needs. One is to provide signs and other information at forest entry points about acceptable uses and guidelines for behavior. Some participants are skeptical about the use of signs for this purpose:

The average life of a sign in a national forest is less than thirty days.

Regardless of this skepticism, there is a perceived need to provide more education and information to address perceptions about the absence of land ethic values among some forest users.

Participants also suggest there is a more general need for the FS to provide information and education to interested publics and forest users about their mission and their management actions. The following statement expresses this desire:

People don't know enough about how fire works in the forest and when it is desirable and when it is not. They could help people to understand those kinds of things. They should communicate more about what they do and why they do it and they would get more support if people understood the whys and wherefores.

The desire for more information is thus perceived to have a practical benefit by improving the behavior of forest users; and, it can also simultaneously address a need for information about forest processes and increase public understanding of agency actions.

Litter

Participant expectations about the aesthetics of forest environments create a sensitivity to litter, especially in backcountry and wilderness areas. However, this sensitivity also applies to picnic areas and other elements of the forest, even some of the roads within forests. For example:

Trash is a big problem. There is a section of Highway 15, my God; if you look on the side of that road it is awful. They need to look at keeping that corridor clean. Personally, that section just really bothers me. It would take 20 people several weeks to clean that up. They should do some adopt-a-highway or adopt-a-trail-program. We should all push our clubs to do that sort of thing and it would help us and help the Forest Service too. If we just got rid of beer, then 80 percent of the litter problem would be solved.

Backcountry litter is especially troublesome since there is some expectation of a “pristine” character to areas of the forest that are out of easy reach by day users. Some participants suggest hunters and especially out-of-area hunters are among the worst offenders.

There are these drop camps out there for hunters. They come here from back east and everywhere. They drop them off with cases of bottled water. Then the hunters go out to hunt and they take their bottles of water and just leave them. That and other litter is all over the place during hunting season. They should have a guide with them. They shouldn't just let them alone if they don't have the ethic to pack out what is taken in. There really needs to be some education by the guides and outfitters and some accountability for the litter their clients leave.

The littering behavior of out-of-area visitors as well as local residents is believed to be a result of a lack of a “land ethic.” This land ethic is believed to foster a sense of personal responsibility and respect for natural resources. Educating young people as well as other forest visitors is perceived as one solution for the problem of littering. There is some expectation this education should be the responsibility of the FS, but education within local schools is also believed to be a complimentary approach to educating school-age persons about land ethics and responsibilities.

An education approach to addressing littering and related problems is also believed to be preferable to relying on enforcement. For example:

You can have a rule, but you have to have some enforcement to back it up. But, rather than be reactive, we should be proactive and work with the kids and others to educate them to deal with it before the problem gets big. Besides, the Forest Service doesn't have the budget or the personnel to hire enough enforcement staff to do the job. The last thing some of us want is another Forest Service person with a gun in the forest.

Management Approaches

There are several themes about changes in future management that are contained within this category of management approaches. These themes are as follows:

- There is a perception of the need to normalize management policies across districts. Participants suggest there is inconsistency in the application of policies across districts.
- There should be more FS presence “on the ground” to understand the specifics about resource conditions and to monitor the need for management changes. Participants consistently emphasized a sentiment similar to that expressed in this quotation:

They have no clue about what is going on out there. It is their own forest and they don't have a clue about what is happening. They need to be out there and interacting with people and with the resource so they have some basis to make decisions.

- A related theme is the need for more public interaction with forest users and interested parties. Participants suggest this increased interaction could benefit trust in the agency as well as provide the public information about forest management issues. For example:

They just need to have people out looking after things. They don't have to wear a gun like their enforcement officers, they just need to be public relations people that go out and talk to people. Then they will know you are there and you can visit with them. The Forest Service does not have good working relationships with anyone. They need people that have good

people skills that can visit with anybody. They just need people in the field. They need a presence out there.

Most participants desire more attention to public interaction in the field by resource specialists and management personnel.

The Gila NF receives positive evaluations about its efforts to manage with consideration of the surrounding ecological context. As one participant suggested:

You just can't manage to the forest boundary or else you will have problems on your hands. They have done a good job of looking beyond their boundaries and they need to keep that up, that is my advice to them.

- There is a need for accountability at all organizational levels, especially for district rangers. The emphasis of this perspective is to establish standards and levels of management performance within a planning environment. A rancher from Grant County commented:
Somehow we have to get the Rangers and the other staff on the same footing as us. We are held accountable for what we do out on the range. They should be too. If the plan says they should treat so many acres, then they need to do that or else they don't get their raise. Right now if they don't do what is in the plan, then there are no consequences. They need some accountability that I don't see there now.

Monitoring

From a public perspective, monitoring of forest conditions and uses is the Achilles heel of forest management. Participants expressed a strong concern about the need for systematic and scientifically sound monitoring of forest conditions. The perceived status of existing monitoring efforts is indicated in the following quotation:

From May to October is a crucial time here on the forest, it is our growing season so to speak. Where is the Forest Service during that time? They are off somewhere fighting fires. Then they come back and they have to write a report and they don't know the conditions on the ground, so they write something that is based on old information or who knows what. That report gets challenged and they have to go to court and things get tied up and so they are behind their desks doing paperwork about the lawsuit and then it is time for fire season again. Someone needs to have an understanding of how things actually are on the ground. We need to know that they know what they are talking about.

This construction of events may or may not be correct, but it expresses a desire for effective monitoring that will benefit the resource as well as those who depend on it. A Catron County rancher offered a comment consistent with the above statement that further illustrates this point:

We have seen them do monitoring and not do monitoring. We are waiting for them to do monitoring on our allotments, but I am becoming a firm believer we need to take responsibility for monitoring on our own allotments. We need to do that. It might cost us some money to do that. The Forest Service has said they might be able to help us find someone to come in and do that and it would not cost us a thousand dollars a day. We need to take the approach of making sure the monitoring is done effectively because it is all coming down to lawsuits. ... I can't help but think that if the Forest Guardians or someone like that sees you out there doing your monitoring, then they might be less likely to take them to court. ... It is

something we have failed to see in the past and it could make some important differences for us.

The perceived need for effective monitoring of management actions and forest conditions is among the highest priorities of participants in this project.

Off-highway Vehicles

Participants from diverse perspectives acknowledge the need for management of OHV use in the Gila NF. However, beliefs about OHV management issues vary widely. There are several themes about the substance of OHV issues and perceived solutions.

- Off-highway vehicles are a legitimate component of multiple-use on public lands, but their use requires more active management attention. As one OHV participant observed:
There needs to be a sensible OHV program here. One that offers economic benefits to the community and one that is environmentally sound too. We need their attention to do that

This statement is in a context of describing perceptions about the compatibility issues of OHV riders and others users. Another OHV participant observed:

OHV is the fastest growing use of the forest and it needs to be managed. We don't want people offended; we don't want to see resource damaged. We don't want erosion and things like that. OHV use in the forest needs to be well managed.

These statements express beliefs about the need for management attention regardless of support for or opposition against OHV use in national forests.

- Off-highway vehicle activity can disrupt other users seeking an experience that is consistent with expectations about the quiet and peaceful environment of a forest. As one participant suggested,
If you go out in the forest, then it is you, God, and the animals. And you have this silence and solitude and then some ATV comes screaming down the trail and disturbs everything.

The expectation of quiet and the pursuit of a “peaceful” experience are for some users in conflict with OHV use.

- Participants believe a few “bad apples” and “outlaw” users create most of the damage caused by OHV activity. This damage is generally perceived to result from off-trail riding and riding on trail in the wrong conditions, especially after rains. Off-trail riding results in “wildcat” trails that then become more widely used. These trails may be in areas that cause erosion or other environmental damage. Off-highway vehicle supporters suggest they desire to be responsible users; and, they value forest resources as much as other users. However, critics suggest OHV use by a few bad apples creates disproportionate damage and therefore requires strict management, especially for off-trail use.
- Management of OHV activity will be controversial because of their use for retrieval of downed game, searching for elk horns, and work related to ranching. Some participants suggest some of these activities (e.g., searching for elk horns) means these vehicles are taken off-trails, but with proper use such as low tire pressure and low speed, they cause little to no

damage. These users express concern about any blanket policy restricting off-trail use, especially for those who are using these vehicles to supplement their income.

- Some users suggest the need for creation of designated use areas for OHV activity. There are two sub-themes illustrated by the following quotations:

- *Anybody that recreates out there has concerns about the 4-wheelers. Like the Saddle Rock area where you have all these sand washes, and the 4-wheelers cruise up and down the washes. They don't do any harm there, but they go beyond there and start going straight up these arid desert hills just because they can. There are lots of tracks out there and there are 4-wheeler tracks everywhere. The Forest Service needs to concentrate on that. Maybe there needs to be a designated use area, but they will have to do a lot of work containing them.*

This sub-theme indicates restricting OHV activity to specific areas for on-trail riding only. This approach stresses “clear indications” for use and non-use of OHVs on forest lands; and, ensuring OHV activity does not result in new roads.

- A second sub-theme is the creation of “sacrifice areas” in which off-trail riding would be allowed. For example:

There are these areas out in the Burro Mountains where I think they just should not be riding. There are some other areas where there are lots of trails and maybe their use out there is ok. They should think about creating some sacrifice areas where people can ride on-trail or off-trail so there is a designated place for that activity. At least you contain the damage that way.

This variation includes the designation of off-trail riding in specific areas as a means to control off-trail riding throughout the forest.

- Other participants expressed beliefs about the need for both education and signs as a means to promote appropriate OHV use in a multi-use management framework. These participants suggest the clear signage that indicates open and closed areas is consistent with allowing OHV activity in a multiple-use environment. This perspective suggests using information and education to work with the responsible OHV riders:

There are no monies to deal with recreational issues and so the OHV uses are not under control. At entry ways to the forest, there needs to be information about what the use issues are and how areas can be used. People want to do the right thing and at these entry points they could manage things with rules and signs.

- Off-highway vehicle users are especially concerned about changing OHV use to a “closed unless designated open” management approach. The following quotation expresses OHV users concern about this management approach:

Closed unless it is designated open, they do that in lots of places. It is a blanket solution caused by a few people. It is the easy answer. The Forest Service needs to do its job and police the situation. On this forest they need to handle it on a case-by-case basis. If the policies they are trying to push nationally are implemented here, there is going to be a screaming revolt.

In summary, OHV riders believe there is a place for them in a multiple-use forest management scheme, but it is important for the FS to address outlaw riders. These users believe proper signage, education, monitoring, and control of bad behavior will allow coexistence of OHV

activity with other users. Other users perceive the need to restrict OHV activity to designated areas because of the potential to disrupt the experience of users seeking a peaceful and quiet forest experience; and, the potential for regular and outlaw OHV activity to cause excessive damage to forest resources.

Population Change and Resource Demand

Pressures on forest resources resulting from population increases and changes in population structure were noted by a range of participants as an important issue that will influence future forest management decision. The following quotation expresses a shared perception about the trend in population increases:

The biggest source of change here is population growth. It is just not growth here, but elsewhere and it interacts with what is going on here. Population in New Mexico is going to double in the next 20 years, so the pressure for land for baby-boomers and others who are looking for their 10 acres is going to increase. If the ranchers can't make it, then they are going to sell and subdivide and you are going to have more people right in the forest where ranches use to be.

Local and regional population increases are perceived to influence the availability of resources for all forest users as well as increasing the numbers of persons living in and around the Gila NF. This statement also expresses a perceived connection between increase demand for rural land, the sale of ranching operations adjacent to forest lands, and potential problems from subdivisions and in-holdings that are developed as ranches are sold.

The amount of population growth is also perceived to result in a larger number of users. And, with these larger numbers there is the likelihood of more abusive “fringe” or outlaw users:

The more you use it the more the fringe is a problem, because the fringe becomes bigger.

Participants suggest these “fringe” or outlaw users have the potential to degrade resources significantly since they tend to engage in abusive off-road riding or otherwise degrade forest resources.

Participants also suggest the types of new residents may create additional forest management problems. This theme suggests new residents may not have the same stewardship values as longer term residents. This theme about different stewardship values is expressed in relationship to a number of management issues and concerns. Although the “younger generation” among existing residents is perceived to need education about stewardship values, there is also a need to address a perceived deficit among new residents. For example,

The new people moving here don't have the same values we do and there is less connection to the land and less understanding of it. They don't have the same connection to the land as we were taught. There is also a tremendous need to educate young people. My parents and my grandfather taught me respect and now there is no sense that 'this is my house.' Children are missing that, they need to renew that sense of ownership we had when we were growing up.

This education of the “younger generation” and newcomers about stewardship values is perceived as an important contribution to a more acceptable engagement of these users with forest resources.

Restoration to Pre-Settlement Conditions

An area of apparent agreement among the diverse participants in this work is the desire for managing forest lands to return to “pre-settlement” conditions. A rancher from Catron County made the following observation:

I think they could resolve many of their management problems in the next 15 years by restoration to pre-settlement conditions. In the next fifteen years I would like to see them restore fifty percent of forest lands to pre-settlement conditions. They can use prescribed fire, natural fire, thinning, and whatever tools it takes. ... They are spending millions of dollars fighting fires and ... if they just let it go, what is it hurting? All of the livestock and other issues they have here on these watersheds would be resolved by returning to pre-settlement conditions.

Another comment from a rancher makes a similar observation:

I would like to see the watershed back in the conditions of pre-settlement times. They can use logging and fire depending on the management areas.

Ranching and timber interests appear to agree with some environmental interests about the desirability of this management strategy. However, there is debate about the specifics of what constitutes “pre-settlement” conditions. Some ranching and timber interests point to significantly fewer trees per acre as indicated by historical photographs and the recollections of “old-timers.” Environmental interests appear to focus more on the absence of buffalo or other ungulates as part of the ecosystem in the pre-settlement era. An implication of these differences for future collaborative work is the need to clarify the meanings about “pre-settlement” conditions and how these can be achieved.

Rights of Way Access

Access to Gila NF lands is described by participants as among the highest priority issues to address in future planning efforts. Participants perceive there is a decline in access resulting from the closure of roads and other access points.

Access is a huge problem. The new people and old ranchers, they put locks on their gates. I don't know of any instances where the Forest Service has insisted on the old prescriptive right of way. They just say 'uh, ok.' For example, right now it is very difficult to get to the wilderness from the Mimbres area. It used to be you could drive down to the river and walk up. You can't do that anymore. ... Lot of access points are closed off by little one acre lots that the road used to run through and it does not anymore. It is a problem that is widespread.

While participants generally agree that access is an issue that needs management attention, there is disagreement about the rights of private property owners in these situations. Some participants express a strong private property rights orientation that suggests landowners have total control over access through their lands. Others disagree, suggesting if there is historical access across private lands, then the public should have trespass rights to access Gila NF managed lands.

There is acknowledgement this is a “highly political” issue that also extends to ranchers who have grazing permits and attempt to prevent access to other users. For example, on OHV user commented:

Now we have ranchers who have closed off public land because they have a lease on it. If they can get away with it they will do it. A property owner who closes off road access to the forest is wrong and the Forest Service needs to challenge those people who are closing off these roads. Access is a big problem facing our community.

Some local government officials suggest the FS could be of assistance to them in more actively pursuing access issues that also involve county governments. This is perceived to offer more authority and resources to respond to instances where access is blocked by private landowners.

Roadless, Wilderness, and other Special Designations

Management issues associated with special designation areas in the Gila NF were a topic of concern for participants with diverse and sometimes conflicting points of view, especially about fire and grazing in wilderness areas. Concerns about the incompatibility of grazing and wilderness are expressed in the following written comments about wilderness values and their relationship to grazing:

We want to see the Gila Wilderness and Aldo Leopold Wilderness managed and protected for the highest wilderness values. Wilderness is a very special place and the Gila Wilderness in particular is special because of its history as the birthplace of wilderness concepts and values. To reach this goal these wilderness areas should be managed for the greatest protection of the ecosystems, watersheds, and wildlife. All grazing permits within the wilderness boundaries should be permanently retired and watersheds restored. Streams, riparian areas, and endangered species should be protected. We feel that our Gila National Forest personnel have done an excellent job in their management of our wilderness and we would like them to continue to do so. From our many hikes in other wilderness areas in other national forests in the west we think the Gila is the most progressive and proactive in managing wilderness for wilderness values.

Other participants reject the notion of grazing as incompatible with wilderness and cite environmental damage as not necessarily resulting directly from grazing, but other causes. For example, the following excerpt from the journal *Range*, discusses a field visit to the Glenn allotment in the Gila Wilderness.

There was only one way to find out what removal of grazing would accomplish and whether it was reasonable to consider it a partial solution. The way to do this was to find an old ranch, preferably wilderness, that hadn't been grazed for a while and compare it to their own allotments. This way they could come up with a reasonable approach to begin repairing damage on the forest allotments that were left, before livestock removal became the only solution to what they believed was really a multi-dimensional problem.

The only allotment that met all of the requirements in the Gila was the Glenn. When Kit and Matt approached Forest Service officials in Silver City and requested a cooperative tour of the Glenn, they weren't greeted with much enthusiasm; in fact, they were totally ignored. After another year of watching their neighbors go down in flames and Kit, owner of the largest wilderness based allotment in the Gila, was facing some serious cow reductions himself, they decided they couldn't wait any longer. They convinced the board of directors of the Gila Forest Permittees to fund a private tour of the Glen

The group was naive enough to believe their pictures and ideas would make a difference. What they failed to recognize was that the ponderosa pine encroachment that caused the deterioration of the Glenn and the rest of the Gila is a direct result of 60 years of Forest Service fire suppression policy. The Agency wasn't looking for answers in the removal of livestock from the wilderness areas of the Gila, it was looking for a scapegoat for its own failures.

The Glenn Allotment does not tell a success story of livestock removal and restoration. Instead it shows the reality of the Forest Service's devastating mismanagement. What the allotment inadvertently shows is the extent that proper grazing and stewardship by ranchers in other parts of the Gila have slowed fire suppression's devastating effects by stimulating grass species and the natural understory that slows water runoff.

The environmental movement wants to see grazing and other uses removed from the forest system lands in order to allow nature to bring the land back to the period before people settled the country. The abandonment of the Glenn shows this is not the answer, but the land management agencies as well as environmental organizations stop their ears to anything but the removal of human influence as a remedy for the devastation the land has suffered (Schneberger 2000).

The positions about grazing within wilderness exemplify the polarization about contentious issues on this forest and perhaps none is more contentious because of significant value-based differences about the meaning and use of wilderness on the Gila NF.

There are two other noteworthy themes about management of wilderness. One concerns the desire to maintain existing levels of wilderness and fire management in wilderness areas. Most participants express satisfaction with the amount of existing wilderness. There is some concern that further attempts to identify areas with special designations may result in conflicts and attention that can undermine the purpose of the special designation. Managing these areas to maintain their existing values is preferred over seeking additional special designations. For example,

It made no sense not to include the main stem of the Gila as a Wild and Scenic River. The Forest Service did not want to do it because of all the hassles and controversy. The Gila Middle Box should have some kind of special protection, but I am hesitant to even bring up special designations because of the controversy and knee-jerk reaction. A special designation brings just a lot of trouble with it. If you can identify reasonable management rules, then the need for a special designation that comes with protection, well it is more about managing ATV, and grazing, and fire, it is much more about management strategies that are addressing the whole system. If you do that, then the smaller areas that need protection will take care of themselves. If you manage, then you can address some of the issues that come with special designations.

Fire management in wilderness areas is also controversial. One position suggests fires in wilderness areas should be suppressed because it results in environmental damage that would not be tolerated outside the wilderness boundaries:

You go up the west fork in the wilderness and there was a fire in there that took everything off the mountain. It all went down the hill and made a mess. ... Just to let the fires go in there will have disastrous results for erosion and sedimentation There just needs to be more

management of fire in the wilderness. That is not their policy, but we just can't continue to have fire in there that way.

Other perspectives suggest that fires in wilderness areas should only be suppressed if they are a threat to property or structures adjacent to wilderness boundaries.

Socioeconomic Opportunities

Participants with different points of view express a desire to create economic opportunities that benefit local communities. Some dialogue about this topic expresses opposing points of view: one perspective suggests there is a need to harvest resources to benefit local communities while the other perspective suggests harvesting forest resources has limited benefit when compared to the benefits that result from tourism and non-consumptive uses. The advocates for consumptive uses suggest that tourism offers local communities limited economic benefits because jobs in this industry are low paying and therefore do not provide a “living wage.” However, these interests see a direct correlation between harvesting resources and the viability of some local communities:

The communities in Catron County are suffering because of the loss of timbering and grazing. The schools are in trouble, there is a decline in enrollment and it is an indicator for us of how bad things are getting. Those are things that really matter. They need to take that into consideration. They need to think about the effects on the future of these communities and the lifestyles of people in this county that know how to take care of the forest. If those people go away, then you are not going to have the knowledge and the infrastructure here to take care of the forest. It is going to suffer. The people living here are going to suffer. The health of the forest and the lifestyles of the people who harvest its resources are connected. They need to realize that, they do realize that, but they are not doing anything about it.

From this perspective, harvesting timber and grazing promotes forest health and supports viable communities that then retain the expertise and infrastructure to benefit forest management. These advocates also stress the uncertainty of the management environment for timber and grazing and desire a future that offers some assurances of timber availability and grazing opportunities that will be incentives for economic development. This is perceived to also offer economic benefits for other community interests:

There is so much growth that needs to be cut. I would like to see the forest healthy. To do that you have to thin it so the fire danger is decreased and the bark beetle is taken care of. The appearance of the forest is an economic development asset. So, how it looks is important and it does not look as good as it should. This can hurt our tourism business and everyone who depends on it.

Advocates for tourism and the amenity benefits of forest resources suggest the economic benefits to local communities from activities such as timber harvesting and grazing are limited:

Agriculture and grazing in particular contributes such a small amount to the county here that it is not worth the risk of damaging the resource for such a small benefit. When you can get so much more from promoting tourism, birdwatching, and things like that, then it is just not worth the risks that come with how grazing is practiced on this forest.

These advocates perceive timber harvesting and grazing as not providing the highest and best use of forest resources when viewed from an economic perspective. The potential for economic gain

from other than consumptive uses is perceived to be more valuable if management focuses on the amenity values of forest resources.

Another perspective about the socioeconomic benefit of the forest is one that emphasizes restoration and small-scale sustainable timber harvesting. Forest restoration is a perceived need that offers potential economic benefits to local residents, if these opportunities are for local residents. Almost universally the Collaborative Forest Restoration Program was praised as an example of the socioeconomic benefits to local communities of forest restoration projects. There are some perceived roadblocks to restoration as a viable socioeconomic opportunity for local communities, especially some agency procedures and requirements for insurance. Participants expressed a desire for a “whole new template for restoration work” to assist small-scale businesses. Part of this “new template” includes consideration of how to work with small-scale logging interests that provide economic benefits to communities and also benefits to forest health through thinning projects. However, there is a perception the agency should change policy to accommodate small-scale timber sales that support such local efforts.

Timber Harvesting and Fire

Timber and fire management appear to be strongly linked in participant views about Gila NF management issues. The polarized positions also appear to influence the assessment of these issues. However, there is some agreement of the need for allowing fires to burn and for selective use of prescribed burns to reduce heavy fuel loads in the forest. One side of the polarized views is expressed in the following quotation:

If we can't timber and we can't graze, then we have to burn. We just can't let the forest keep growing up. ... It has got to be managed. If we turn fire loose and just say 'let Mother Nature take care of itself,' then that will not work. We need to reseed. We are burning these large 200 to 300 year old junipers that never would burn if the forest had been protected by fire. We are doing damage that would never have happened if it had been taken care of. We need to burn now to protect the forest.

The alternative position agrees with the need for natural and prescribed fire to manage forests. Although there is some variability in beliefs about this issue, a central theme is expressed in the following statement:

We need to restore natural fire to the ecosystem here. We have suppressed natural fires in too heavy handed a way and the results are problematic. Natural fire has a place in this ecosystem; it is part of the natural processes that allow these forests to be what they are. When you step in and try to manage the processes through fire suppression, then you see the results. A more natural fire regime will make a difference, and I think the Gila is going in the right direction.

The other fire related theme in the data suggests a desire to see more effort and funding for prevention and restoration rather than fire suppression. For example:

I don't see a lot of dollars for range improvement or for restoration. When there is a restoration project, people go get the money and bring it to the Forest Service. When the tap turns on it is for fire suppression that is gold plated right there. If we had ten percent of the fire suppression money to put into restoration and land management, then it would not take very many years and they would not need that much money for fire suppression.

There are several other related themes about timber harvesting, some related to fire, and others expressing beliefs about the management of timber on the Gila NF:

- Photographs and stories from old-timers indicate there were far fewer trees per acre at the turn of the century than there are now. This indicates the need for a thinning policy that will reduce the number of trees per acre to improve forest health.
- The density of trees is so thick it is a significant fire danger. One participant suggested the trees are “like a bunch of match sticks waiting to ignite.” Some participants suggest the density of trees and underbrush will result in unusually hot fires that will damage resources more than a fire in more natural conditions.
- Timber harvesting should be supported in order to maintain the infrastructure necessary to process material for commercial and restoration purposes.
- Maintaining a timber industry is undermined because of limited timber sales by the FS. Some participants suggest the agency is inhibited by concerns about lawsuits that can damage their individual careers. These concerns are believed to limit offering timber sales on the Gila NF.
- There is a significant investment required to invest in the timber industry. Without a predictable supply of timber, there is little incentive to maintain the infrastructure to harvest timber. As one participant observed:

The Forest Service won't guarantee anything beyond one sale and when the costs to gear up for a sale are so high, you just can't do it. If they are just going to put up a one-half million board foot sale and nothing after that, then nothing can happen and you won't have the infrastructure here. It does not take a rocket scientist to tell they are not going to do many timber sales when they are getting rid of all the people who know anything.

- The agency should make accommodations for smaller-scale timber sales that fit the needs of local businesses and those who would like to participate in the timber industry.

Timber harvesting rivals grazing as a contentious issue on the Gila NF. The past history of conflicts were noted by a range of participants who were either supportive of limiting timber harvesting to restoration activities or advocating for a return to harvesting timber with no diameter caps. One participant suggested it is possible to return to a “reasonable” level of timber harvesting by using the stewardship values of local residents:

The only way any of it can be done is to use our stewardship values. If they give you a twenty year contract, and you cut timber and manage the other timber and then at the end of that twenty year period you have done a good job, then you get another contract. Turn it loose on the private individual whether it is grazing or timber and if you give a man the incentive to use that land and improve that land, then he will do it. Maybe you have the occasional one that won't, but they will be weeded out. When you motivate individuals, then you can get something done. I don't think you can motivate a bureaucrat, but if you are working together there is a possibility to show an improvement. They would have to give it a test, it would take a few years, and you can't turn these things around overnight. This is a way you can successfully manage the forest and keep it here for future generations.

This quotation expresses a vision of management based on the values of individual stewardship and a long-term view of forest health. However, it also expresses nearly every dimension of conflict about the management of timber, grazing, and other forest resources. For example,

- There is suspicion and distrust among some about the stewardship values of local residents when there are examples of past abuses.
- The past abuses are believed to have left the forest vulnerable to excessive damage from what might appear to be slight abuse by a few “bad apples.” The time it takes to “weed out” the bad apples can therefore result in ongoing damage to forest resources.
- Individuals motivated by self-interest may have a short-term rather than the long-term view of resource health. Short-term self-interest can result in long-term damage to forest resources.
- The yardstick for what constitutes a healthy forest to pass on to future generations has a different length and breadth for those who oppose large-scale timber harvesting, grazing, and other commercial uses.

The contrast in perspectives about timber harvesting indicates the challenges to identifying future management approaches that will meet the needs of diverse interests. These different perspectives also suggest the challenges to engage diverse interest groups in future collaborative efforts that will be productive. This will require attention to the different yardsticks used by each party to understand the issues and the potential solutions.

Chapter 6. Community-Forest Relationships

Participants describe a history of contentious community-forest relationships, especially in Catron County. A full treatment of the substance and processes of this history is beyond the scope of this document since it would require a detailed case study to analyze the dynamics of these conflicts from agency and community perspectives. This work focuses on describing public beliefs and values about improving community-forest relationships from the perspective of participants in this process.

This description of these issues is framed by context issues about Forest Service (FS) structure, organization, and management processes. These context issues are summarized as background to describe three themes about facilitating problem solving, fairness, and collaboration as foundations for improving community-forest relationships. These three themes were identified from discussions about successful community-forest relationships in ranger districts on the Gila NF, which are generally perceived to be more satisfactory than relationships with the Supervisors Office.

Organizational Processes

A perceived strength of the Gila NF is its “inter-agency” working relationships. Several participants from state and local agencies describe positive working relationships with forest leadership. They note the forest “thinks outside its boundaries” and regularly communicates and coordinates with other agencies. There is also criticism from some state agencies that the FS is sometimes too focused on managing the “issue of the moment.” There is also praise for recognizing how management decisions can affect state and local jurisdictions.

Community members offer less praise than staff from other government agencies. These participants express frustration with some processes of the FS, particularly the following:

- Rangers and forest supervisors should be “tied to the community.” Residents, especially in the rural areas of these counties, emphasize a desire for forest managers to be members of their communities so there is an incentive for local accountability. One Catron County participant described her expectation as follows:

In the old days the Ranger was tied to the community. When you needed something done, then you went to them and it got done. In 1910 or so, someone in the Forest Service said local managers could get too friendly with the local people, so rotate them. This creates a deliberate disconnect between the people, the land, and the Agency. The local Agency does not have long-term contact with the resource. The decision-makers don't have to live with the effects of their decisions and they are not held accountable. If they lived here, like the rest of us, they would be accountable for the conditions here.

Participants describe a history of frustration with the effects of rotating managers out of their posts.

- Limited knowledge of southwestern ecological processes among staff that often have short tenure on the forest. These staff may make decisions with knowledge that does not apply to southwestern ecological processes.
- Management does not reward taking risks and “doing the right thing” for forest resources. The most usual example cited is the reluctance of district rangers and others to use prescribed burns because,

There is a big downside if the fire gets out of hand, but if you don't do it, then you aren't going to get in trouble. They aren't graded on the risks they take. You can take that example and see it in most everything they do. Don't rock the boat, put your time in and get promoted.

Participants suggest the reward system within the agency hampers the initiative to take management actions that can have ecological or community benefits.

- Centralized management is perceived to be undermining the effectiveness of district rangers. In general, participants prefer more “local control” of management decisions. Management from Washington, Albuquerque, or Silver City is less desirable than management from Glenwood or Reserve. A corollary to this concern is the perception the authority of district rangers is undermined when they are required to enforce unpopular decisions made in the Supervisors Office or elsewhere. For example:

Sometimes they (district rangers) don't communicate because they don't want to tell us what is going on because they are concerned with the reactions. They may not be making the decisions, but they become the bad guy because they have to tell people about the decision.

- Rangers are perceived to have incompatible roles as regulators and community advocates. This incompatibility is describes as follows:

The Ranger has this dual role of being the regulator and the advocate for the people their district. As long as the Ranger is the advocate and the regulator, then it is difficult to build trust. Maybe the regulators should not be in the community and the Ranger should be the advocate in the community.

This statement expresses the desire for maintaining trust in the key relationship between community and district rangers who are often the most accessible forest managers.

- Rangers and others are not “on the ground” because they are mired in paperwork related to appeals and NEPA requirements. The result is a loss of knowledge about local ecological conditions. This undermines trust in the ability of the agency to develop management policies that are consistent with environmental conditions.
- Participants also desire more transparency in the planning and decision-making process. The substance of this concern is (1) the perception that decisions are based on political considerations rather than what is best for the resource and (2) a desire for feedback about public input, especially when decisions are made that appear to contradict public desires. Participants expressed a desire for a process that is observable and has built-in feedback to communities and interested parties. As one resource professional noted:

One of the biggest things they need to do is work on communication. ...The biggest thing is total openness with their constituents, the people who use the forest need to know what is going on. Don't do anything under the table. Realize you are going to be on the hot seat and when you have a chunk of ground like this that people depend on, you are going to have a lot of opinions. You have to be open with everyone. They are doing a good job now, but we all need to do that better.

These are the primary themes in the information about organizational processes that influence the relationships between communities and the FS. The following points describe some specific topic areas participants describe as requiring attention to improve community-forest relationships.

Facilitating Problem Solving and Mutual Understanding

There are themes about improving the environment for collaboration between stakeholders and the FS and themes about a role for the agency to facilitate collaboration among interests and groups with diverse interests. Some participants suggest there is a need for a more sincere approach to community-forest collaboration as noted by this resident from Silver City:

There is a lot of talk about collaboration, but the system for collaboration is calling someone and checking it off the list. Collaboration is different than that. They need to be serious about it if they want us to work with them.

This sentiment expresses a general theme about a perceived need for more sincere efforts to engage diverse publics in face-to-face problem solving and collaboration.

Participants describe the existing social environment regarding forest management as frustrating and tense. They also suggest the FS has an important role in encouraging collaboration and problem solving about differences in public desires for forest management. For example:

We are very polarized here and as I listen to people talk around the table I hear that, but I also hear some commonalities in how we care for this place. I would like to see the Forest Service do more of this, more facilitating understanding of different positions and different values so we can solve some of our differences.

Another participant expressed more frustration about the differences in points of view and a desire for more active work by the agency to address these issues:

The positions are so politicized. How are they (Forest Service) ever going to solve these problems? How are the needs of all the stakeholders going to be met? They need to work with stakeholders and also work with community groups to do something about this. They should make more effort to bring people together. They are the ones in the middle. They are the ones that have to do something about this.

There is also an expressed desire for more outreach by the agency and “visiting people on their own turf.” As one participant noted:

You see our Ranger out on horseback, you see her hiking the trail, you even see her with a shovel in her hand doing what needs to be done. That is what they should be doing. They need to get out, they need to reach out to us and see the problems as we see them. They can come to our meetings, they can do lots of things to make themselves more in touch with the community, but it is only happening in a few spots and they should learn from that.

Participants express a clear desire for the agency to view issues from the perspective of community residents and to act as an agent to facilitate problem solving around divisive issues.

Fairness

Ranching and timber interests perceive the “environmentalists” have undue influence with the Supervisor’s Office and other decision makers. Environmental interests suggest the agency caters to ranching and timber interests because of the political “clout” wielded by these groups. Both positions believe they are politically disadvantaged and they each express a desire for “fairness”

in the working relationships with community interests. This fairness entails ensuring that each point of view is considered and there is a response to issues raised. When asked for an example of fairness, a rancher replied:

The Ranger here has done a good job of hearing all points of view. I don't always agree with her and she has made some decisions that have gone against me. I don't like it, but I go along with it because I know she looked at it from my point of view and from what the regulations say and she did what she thought was best. That is not the kind of treatment we got in the past and we don't get that from Silver City. But, she is fair. And as long as we see that all sides are given their due, then I can live with the outcome.

Meeting local expectations about fairness appears to be a foundation for the success of some rangers, and it also is the desired basis for relationships with the Supervisor's Office.

Collaboration

Participants generally praised district rangers for their communication, cooperation, and collaboration with community members. However, they express a desire for more collaborative efforts and outreach at all levels of forest management. The substance of this expectation is expressed in the following two quotations:

Each year they should meet with the people in the community. They should tell us why they do what they do, they should ask for our input about it and provide us with an opportunity later to ask questions about why they did or did not do what we asked. It is a way for all of us stakeholders to hold the Forest Service accountable for their management. Right now I don't think they are being held accountable by us. This would help and I think they should have some community accountability.

Another participant observed:

The take our input, but you never know how serious they are about it. Some people are. Our Ranger listens to us; she does a good job of that. She will get people who have to make a decision together and she will hear our point of view and work with us to try to reach our goals and meet her obligations. You can't ask for much more than that. They should take a look at doing something like that all over the forest.

There is a desire for more effective collaboration with stakeholders; and there is an expectation the agency should respond to this perceived need. Participants point to several ranger districts, including Glenwood and the Black Range, as providing examples of how successful collaboration can be implemented. This desire for more effective collaboration was described by a rancher from Catron County as follows:

One thing I would like to convey to the Forest Service is we would like to work with them. Basically they are a good bunch of guys. If they were not forced into lots of stuff, they are getting regulated from above and decision-making needs to go back to the districts. But, if they work with us, we can work this out.

Despite the contentiousness of past relationships, there appears to be a foundation for future collaboration with residents throughout the region.

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Appendix. Topic Areas for Discussion

The following topic areas will guide the discussion about forest and grasslands management.

Identity. Each participant will be asked to describe their interest in management of national forests and grasslands and any particular perspective or interest/stakeholder group with which they are affiliated.

Community Character and Recent Changes. This topic address about the lifestyles and social life in communities adjacent to national forests and grasslands. The purpose of this discussion topic is to understand the connections between communities and these public lands. Example questions are:

How would you describe this place to someone who has never been here, both the place and the way of life?

How has this community changed in the last 10-15 years? What are the important sources of change?

What are your thoughts about the challenges for this community/region?

What communities, occupations, or lifestyles are most and least affected by how national forest and grasslands are managed?

Uses. Communities and groups have connections to national forests and grasslands from the types of uses of these lands. This topic develops the range of uses of national forests and grasslands. Example questions to discuss are:

What are the most and least common uses of these national forest and grasslands?

Are there any types of existing or potential uses that are not compatible with these lands?
Do all users get along?

Is there anything the FS should do to change how forests and grasslands are used in the future?

Resources. This topic area identifies the types of resources that are contained within national forests and grasslands. This will aid in identifying the connections between communities and resources of the national forests and grasslands. An example issue to develop is:

A place is often thought of as the sum of its parts. Can you describe the parts, the types of resources of this national forest or grassland?

What are the special qualities and characteristics of these grasslands?

Areas for Special Designations. Some Forests and Grasslands have an area or geographic feature that is given a special designation such as wilderness, wild and scenic river, roadless area, or research natural area.

For any existing area, how do you describe the qualities and characteristics of this area?
What does it contribute to communities in this area?

What are the benefits of having this type of area in this national forest or grasslands? (Local, national, other?)

If areas for special designation do not exist on this national forest or grasslands, is there are need to identify a particular place or landscape? If so, where?

Are there other types of “special places” in this national forest or grasslands? (Locate these on forest/grasslands map). And, what are the qualities of these places that make them “special?”

National forest and grasslands Benefits and Values. “Value” has several definitions such as “attributed worth or merit.” This discussion will develop locally meaningful definitions about values and identify specific values about national forests and grasslands.

Similarly, a “benefit” can refer to the types of effects that result from a resource such as a national forest or grassland. Some benefits may be economic and others may be recreational. Some communities, groups, or individuals may receive more benefits than others from having such resources nearby. This topic area will address questions such as:

What is valued about national forests and grasslands?” (e.g., Products, Services, Opportunities, Existence)

What are the benefits to nearby communities and groups from national forests and grasslands?”

Desired Futures. Many people have an idea of how they would like to see a place such as a national forest be in the future. They have ideas about current conditions and how those should change to improve the landscape and its resources. This topic will develop information about your future vision for national forest and grasslands resources. Example questions this topic will address are:

How would you compare the conditions in the forest now to how you would like to see them in the future?

What should the Forest Service do to achieve your future vision for these lands?

Key Management Issues and Priorities for Future Forest Management. The Forest Service is developing strategic plans to guide future management of national forests and grasslands. An understanding of public assessments of existing plans and future needs can help the agency to identify planning issues. To discuss this topic, we can address questions such as:

What do you think is broken and what needs to be fixed as the FS revises existing plans?

What has the FS done well in its management of lands and resources here? Are any changes needed in the management strategy in those areas?

What are the “bottom line” issues for you in revision of the existing plan? That is, are there management issues that absolutely must be addressed or changed from how they are now?

Additional Issues. These topics are guiding the discussion, but there may be others that you feel are important and need to be included. Please identify any additional topics you feel need to be considered by the FS as it tries to understand the connections between communities and national forests and grasslands.