

# **Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests Forest Plan Revision Public Comments Summer/Fall 2006**

## **BACKGROUND**

As of November 1, 2006, the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests received over 1,000 comments related to Forest Plan Revision and the implementation of the Travel Management Rule. Comments were gathered during meetings with the public, agencies, organizations, and forest user groups, as well as via e-mails, letters, phone calls, and comments forms.

These comments were placed into subject categories and summarized by members of the Apache-Sitgreaves Planning and Travel Management Teams. This document contains a general summary of the comments.

## **SUMMARY OF COMMENTS**

### **American Indian Rights & Interests**

- ✦ Forest threats may spread to Tribal lands – mistletoe, fire, etc.
- ✦ Forest users may trespass onto Tribal lands – horn hunters, poachers, etc.
- ✦ Maintenance of Forest improvements bordering Tribal lands – fence, roads, etc.
- ✦ Forest products are important to tribal gathering – acorns, roots, nuts, etc.

### **Economics**

- ✦ Recognize the Forests' contribution to the local economy (via logging, grazing, recreation, tourism, property value, transportation system, etc.).
- ✦ Consider economic effects in plan analyses and monitoring.

### **Fire Management**

- ✦ Build up of fuels increases the potential fire threat.
- ✦ Need to utilize prescribed and natural fire (Coordinate with permitted users. Allow to burn in steep, inaccessible areas.).
- ✦ Need for fire protection and fuels treatment around communities.
- ✦ Protect vs. do not protect structures during wildfire suppression.
- ✦ Close Forest sooner during high fire danger.

### **Forest Access**

- ✦ Roads being closed and ineffectiveness of closure devices.
- ✦ Need to reexamine wildlife habitat closure areas.
- ✦ Diminished vehicle access to the Forest.
- ✦ Access for persons with disabilities may be affected.
- ✦ Retain access for emergency/fire vehicles, general motorized vehicles, dispersed camping/hunting/hiking, permitted use, forest management, forest products, and private land.

## **Forest Health & Threats**

- ✳ Consider effects of climate & drought.
- ✳ Losing grasslands because of conifer and piñon/juniper encroachment.
- ✳ Landscapes being fragmented and effects on wildlife and ranching lifestyle.
- ✳ Need insect and disease management, specifically mistletoe infection.
- ✳ Need detection, mapping, and management of noxious & invasive weeds.
- ✳ General species mortality, specifically loss of aspen.
- ✳ Forest is too thick and overgrown.

## **Forest Products**

- ✳ Firewood gathering policy needs review (diameter limit, areas open, types permitted). Use of motor vehicles for firewood gathering being limited.
- ✳ Need to salvage dead and dying trees (spruce, etc).
- ✳ Need sustainable woody biomass.
- ✳ Need more stewardship projects and need to implement faster.
- ✳ Need small sales program and more logging/timber sales.

## **FS Communication & Mgmt**

- ✳ Need more outreach and education with general public and school-age children on FS history and mission, natural processes, Leave No Trace, wildlife.
- ✳ Laws (NEPA, ESA), other mandates, lawsuits, and appeals are affecting FS ability to manage. Need more FS personnel on the Forest (presence).
- ✳ Need to consult and coordinate with local, State, and Federal agencies and organizations (BLM, State Lands, AZGFD, USFWS, counties, Sheriff's office) and Tribes. Role of other agencies in planning and management of the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forests.
- ✳ Agree vs. do not agree with Forest Service management approaches (decisions, management styles, priorities, FS personnel actions, etc).
- ✳ Public involvement not effective. Use of public input in the planning process. Need to utilize local input.
- ✳ Need to identify opportunities and encourage more volunteers and partnerships.

## **Heritage Resources**

- ✳ Consider cultural, historic, and prehistoric resources in the plan.

## **Law Enforcement**

- ✳ Increase law enforcement vs. decrease.
- ✳ Increased garbage and littering on Forest.
- ✳ Need to focus law enforcement on violators.
- ✳ Suggest methods to supplement law enforcement (AZGFD, citizen enforcement, charge fees to user groups) and increase conformance (increase education, review citations and fines, hotline for reporting violations).

## **Law & Regulation**

- ✳ Laws (NEPA, ESA), regulations, other mandates affecting forest management.
- ✳ Implement specific laws and regulations – Economic Flexibility Act, FFMA/FFMIA, Organic Act.

## **Multiple Use**

- ✳ Continue multiple use management vs. limit or restrict certain uses.
- ✳ Conflicts occur when multiple use is practiced (recreation, grazing, and wildlife).

## **National Forest System Lands**

- ✦ Need more land exchanges vs. no more land exchanges.
- ✦ Consistency in the process, policy, administration for special uses.
- ✦ Special use needs include outfitter guide permits, utility easements, transportation rights of way, brush pits.

## **Outdoor Recreation**

### *Developed*

- ✦ Recreation sites managed by concessionaire – site maintenance, personnel concerns.
- ✦ Increase developed recreation facilities (campsites, boating sites) vs. no new development.
- ✦ Maintain and improve recreation facilities.
- ✦ Effects of recreation on other resources (riparian, noise, safety, grazing, water).
- ✦ Need no-fee campgrounds.
- ✦ Need maps and information regarding camping areas (post to website).

### *Dispersed*

- ✦ Need to maintain current dispersed camping opportunities vs. increase those opportunities.
- ✦ Effects of other management actions on dispersed camping.
- ✦ Effects of other management actions on game retrieval.
- ✦ Other dispersed recreation – undisturbed/undeveloped areas, shooting areas, watchable wildlife, scenic byway, adopt-a-trail
- ✦ Effects of other management actions and prescribed burning on hunting and fishing.
- ✦ Need maintained non-motorized trails.

### *OHV (Off-Highway Vehicle) Management*

- ✦ Need to increase vs. balance vs. eliminate OHV use/opportunities.
- ✦ Effects of OHV use (new roads, noise, erosion, user conflicts, litter, wildlife, pollution, safety, heritage resources, homeowners).
- ✦ Need more OHV opportunities (jeep trails, loop trails, longer trails, areas).

## **Planning Process**

- ✦ Assessments and research used in Forest Plan Revision process should be impartial.
- ✦ Need to have effective monitoring.
- ✦ Questions related to process of Forest Plan Revision.

## **Riparian**

- ✦ Emphasize riparian management.

## **Rangeland Management**

- ✦ Questions regarding criteria used for determining grazing suitability and livestock capacity.
- ✦ Effects of livestock (cow, sheep, feral horses) on other resources.
- ✦ Allotment management issues – stocking rate, maintenance improvement, allotment closures, vehicle access.
- ✦ Recognize benefits of grazing and the ranching lifestyle.

## **Special Areas**

- ✦ Make Blue Primitive Area wilderness vs. do away with it.
- ✦ Need roadless areas vs. no need for them.
- ✦ Need more wilderness vs. no more wilderness.
- ✦ Do away with “wild & scenic” study rivers.

## **Social**

- ✦ Recognize that population and demand for forest resources continues to increase.
- ✦ Recognize traditional use and culture (local forest users, communities, grazing, logging).
- ✦ People coming to the area cause “problems”.

## **Transportation System**

- ✦ Existing roads may be closed.
- ✦ Need more roads vs. current amount of roads vs. fewer roads.
- ✦ Need motorized opportunities (jeeps, areas, connector routes, utilization of ‘logging’ roads).
- ✦ Implementation and maintenance of transportation system (signing, classification, budget, etc).
- ✦ Suggestions and questions regarding inventory and map of transportation system.
- ✦ Effects related to transportation system (erosion, air, water, noise, wildlife).

## **Vegetation/Silvicultural Treatments**

- ✦ Need more thinning of forest vegetation.
- ✦ Need to manage a variety of vegetative compositions/structures.

## **Water**

- ✦ Consider effects on water rights.

## **Wildlife & Fisheries**

- ✦ Manage and protect T&E species vs. management of specific species (Mexican Wolf, Spotted Owl, Goshawk, Apache Trout).
- ✦ Continue to improve fisheries, review priority streams. Fish populations declining.
- ✦ Need to reexamine wildlife habitat closure areas.
- ✦ Manage wildlife (antelope, elk, bear) and effects to wildlife and habitat from other management activities and forest uses (grazing, fire, noise, disturbance, timber harvest).